

# UNDERSTANDING THE REAL-TIME GOOGLE PENGUIN



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# Introduction

Ever since Google launched their first search algorithm, they tried to provide the best and the most relevant results for their users. The only way to keep their visitors' trust is to provide them with high-quality search results. To achieve that, Google and other search engines calculate the value of different parameters like the power and trustworthiness of a backlink, the quality, and uniqueness of its content, user experience and many others.

The beginning of search engines was also the birth of different manipulation strategies developed by webmasters to achieve a better ranking. For many years, tons of low-quality and irrelevant backlinks helped webmasters reach their goals.

Google decided to fight against these manipulations; every new algorithm update changed the rules of the game. In the beginning, they decided not to pass link juice through such backlinks. This practice didn't work very well because it didn't keep webmasters from building and buying spammy, low-quality backlinks.

Finally, in April 2012, Google launched the Penguin algorithm. Since then, hundreds of thousands of websites all around the world have been penalized because they had spammy, fake, irrelevant or low-quality backlinks.

This eBook is all about Google Penguin – Google's automated Spam-fighter algorithm update aiming to decrease the search engine ranking of websites that violate [Google's Webmaster Guidelines](#).

Google updated the Penguin algorithm several times since 2012:

- **Penguin 1** on April 24, 2012 (impacting ~3.1% of queries)
- **Penguin 1.1** on May 25, 2012 (impacting less than 0.1%)
- **Penguin 1.2** on October 15, 2012 (impacting ~0.3% of queries)
- **Penguin 2.0** on May 22, 2013 (impacting 2.3% of queries)
- **Penguin 2.1** on October 4, 2013 (impacting ~1% of queries)
- **Penguin 3.0** on October 17, 2014 (impacting around 1% of queries)
- **Penguin 4.0 & Real Time** on September 23, 2016 (Google did not give a specific number of the percentage of queries it impacted. Maybe it's because the update is constantly happening and the percentage will constantly be changing.)





With every new Google Penguin update, many websites got penalized. SEOs could see dramatic changes in the SERPs and the webmasters who disavowed bad links and improved their backlink profiles recovered their rankings.

On September 23, 2016, Google officially announced that they made Google Penguin part of their Core Algorithm. SEOs find the Real Time Penguin to be a good thing since there will be no more massive changes coming with each update. Also, webmasters will not need to wait for years for a Google Penguin update to take place so that they can recover from a Penguin penalty. Everything happens in real time now.

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*As Google confirmed, links remain the #1 ranking factor, alongside content and “RankBrain.”*

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Google loves links; it only hates the spammy ones. Read this eBook if you want to know how to keep your website safe from a Google Penguin penalty and build links that help your website rank better.

Here’s what you will learn:

- how SEO strategies change with the Real Time Google Penguin;
- what is link risk management and why you need to do it on a regular basis;
- what is negative SEO and how to protect your website against it;
- why links are important and why link risk management is vital for online businesses;
- why looking only at your backlink profile is not enough;
- what is competitive domain analysis, how to do it the right way and how it can help you rank better than your competitors;
- why you need to clean your backlink profile;
- how to clean your bad backlinks;
- how the Real Time Google Penguin works;
- why you should not wait for Google to re-crawl your links;
- what the granularity of the Real Time Penguin means;
- how do you diagnose websites that have partial Penguin penalties;
- what is link building;
- why you need good links;
- how to find and build great links that will help boost your rankings.

# 1. How to avoid a Google Penguin penalty?



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What is link risk management, why you need to do it on a regular basis and how to do it the right way.

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## 1.1 The Real Time Penguin requires that you look at your link profile daily

Did you ever have second thoughts whether you should invest in protecting your website against the risks of negative SEO? Did you ever worry about Google penalties?

You should not overlook taking care of your online business. Protecting your website is just as important as signing a house insurance. Disaster can hit anytime. Negative SEO is a real threat. Google Penguin is now part of Google's Core Algorithm, and it detects spam in real time. You need to look at your backlink profile on a regular basis, find and disavow all the bad links before Google does.

After the first Google Penguin update in 2012, we have seen many companies losing millions of dollars. Some of these companies even had to close down their business because they could not survive the ranking drops. As a result, thousands of people lost their jobs.

Still, most of you out there do not have a clue what a BIG RISK you take if you choose not to invest in link risk management.

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*If you handle online marketing in your company and you do not know how your company's website link profile looks like, this is simply careless!*

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In the Real Time Google Penguin era, you have to know how your link profile, as well as your competitors' link profiles, look like. You also have to track your incoming backlinks every day.

Think about it: each business must protect itself against any possible damage like fire, theft, etc. But what about online businesses? Do they choose to protect themselves against negative SEO, do they try to prevent Google penalties by monitoring their backlinks regularly? Most businesses have no insurance against any kinds of online risk.

The riskiest factor in the online world is triggering an algorithmic Google Penguin filter. But not only Penguin is looking at your backlink profile – also Google's manual penalties, as well as other filters, could get you into trouble.

## 1.2 Find out if your website already has a Penguin Penalty

Some companies already know that links are important, but have the wrong approach towards link building and SEO in general. It regularly happens that people decide to start link building campaigns without having a clue about their link profile, not to mention their competitor's backlink profiles.

In SEO, like in any industry, competitive analysis is a critical step. You need to see what your competitors are doing, blend in and do a little bit better. There are different niches on the web, and you need to make sure that your link profile doesn't look much different to the ones of your biggest competitors.

Here's the most important question that you need to ask yourself before you start an SEO campaign:

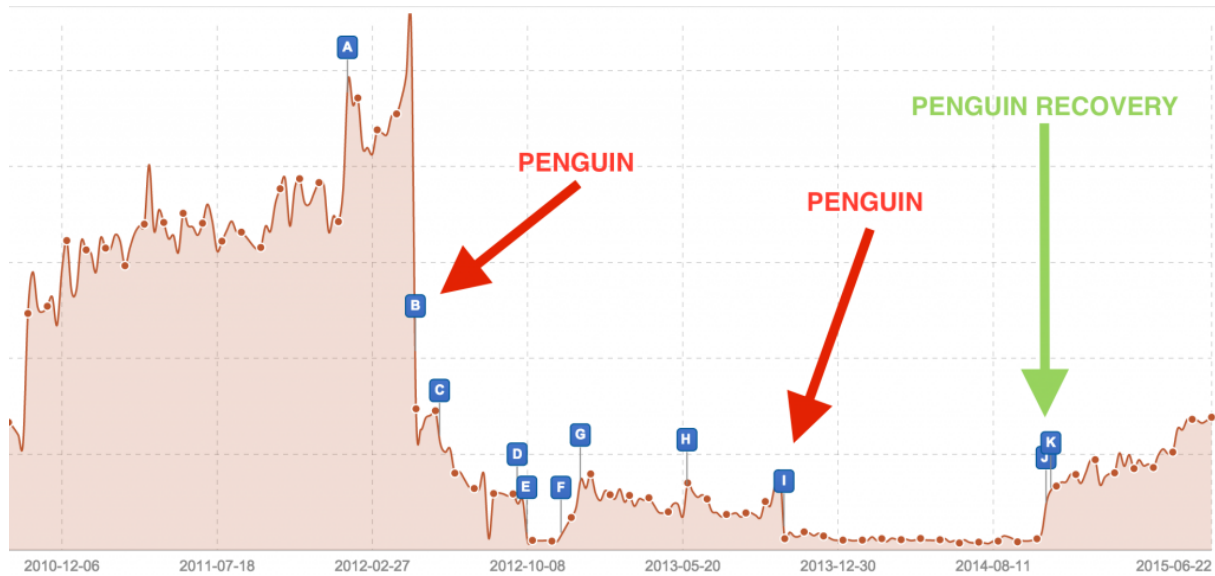
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*Is my backlink profile clean?  
Or can my website get a Google penalty any moment now?*

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Think about this: did you build cheap links in the past? The risk is still there; you need to get rid of these links as soon as possible since Google does care about them. Instead of simply ignoring bad links, Google adds a negative value to them.

A good SEO will always check the competitor's situation, the link profile and the SEO visibility of new clients before they start a link building campaign. If your website got hit by Penguin already, you need a link audit and clean-up before you start building new links.



Blindly continuing building links is not helpful in this situation at all! Rather, finding the reasons for that punishment and eliminating them is the first step you need to take to save the future of your business.

It is hard work to make these clients understand the long-term consequences as well as all the time and money they have to put in getting out of the Penguin trap. This is something they must do BEFORE they can expect any good ranking results as a consequence of building quality links.

The best way to find out if Penguin already hit your website is by checking the website's SEO visibility.

### 1.3 Understand your link profile as well as your competitor's link profiles

With Google Penguin 4.0, your website can trigger a Penguin filter at any time. That is why you must manage your link risk constantly if you want to avoid a penalty.

If you're aiming for great rankings, you need to have a clean backlink profile, and you need to know it in great detail and keep an eye on the changes. But that's not nearly all. Comparing your website with your top competitors and understanding the keyword and link ratios and the different risk levels in your niche is also essential for good SEO.

### 1.3.1. Anchor Text Ratios

Your links' anchor texts are highly important. You can only achieve good rankings for specific keywords when you have equivalent backlinks, but also a healthy backlink profile.

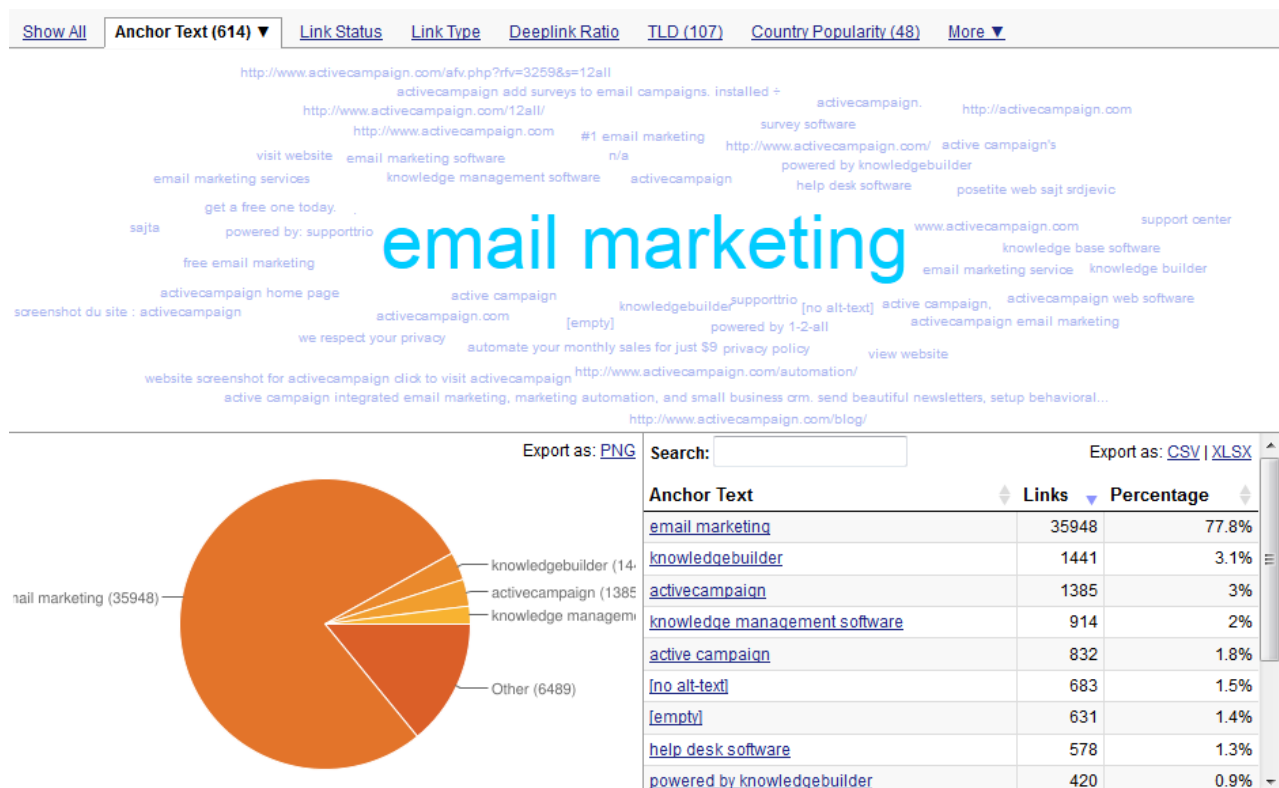
There are four types of anchor texts (=keywords):

- a. **MONEY keywords** are those keywords people want their websites to rank for. Usually, these are the keywords that are popular and often searched for. Always keep in mind: an unnatural ratio of money keyword links might help you gain high rankings now, but it will lead to an algorithmic or manual penalty in the future.
- b. **BRAND keywords** are those keywords that you can associate with your company. That can be a certain product, service or the company name or domain name itself. Brand anchor texts should be your main type of anchor texts.
- c. **COMPOUND keywords** are keywords that consist of both - "Brand" and "Money" Keywords. They are a mixture of these two types.
- d. **OTHER keywords** are all keywords that do not fit into any of the categories named above. Anchor texts like "see here" or "like that" etc. are very natural ones. The adequate ratios for each keyword type are the ones that are similar to the competitors' in a certain niche.

Backlinks with appropriate anchor texts are fundamental for the rankings. However, it is very important not to cross the money keyword ratio of your competitors. Most of the time, a website that got hit by a Google algorithmic update or a Manual Action had too many hard anchor texts. It is, of course, possible to beat the competitors with other, less risky tactics than having more money keywords.

Since Google released its first Penguin update, an over-optimization of money keywords can simply kill a business as this leads for sure to a Google punishment.

You can easily check the distribution of a website's anchor text by creating a [Backlink Profiler \(BLP\)](#) report:



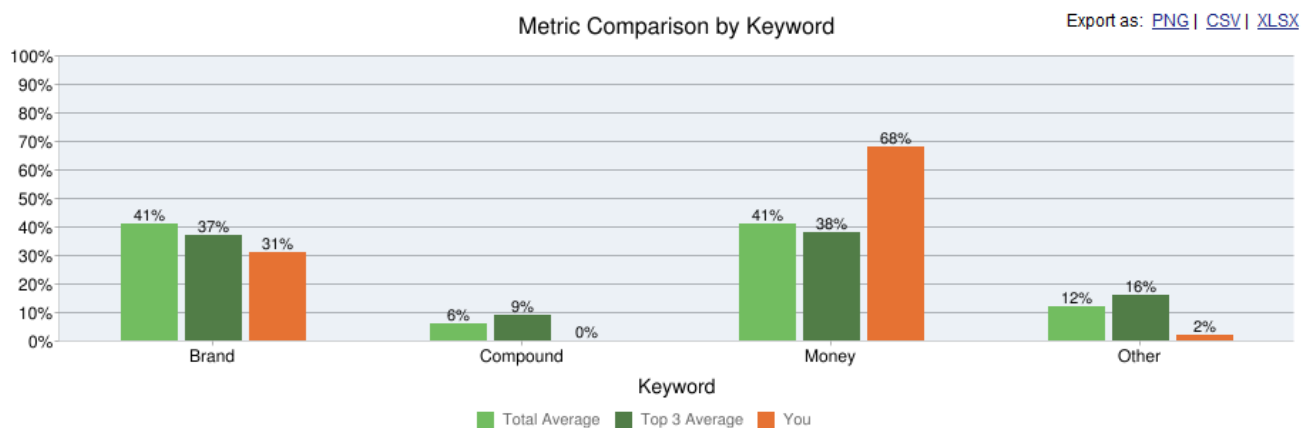
By sorting out all anchor texts by count, we can see that the website has an impressive number of money anchor text links.

In detail: the website's topic here is all about e-mail marketing automation software. So the anchor text "email marketing" is for sure a money keyword. This is a money keyword that this website wants to rank for. If you add all the ratios, more than 80% of all keywords are money keywords.

To determine if this ratio is too high, we need to check the competitors' ratios.

You can do that using the [Competitive Landscape Analyzer \(CLA\)](#).

As a result, you will get a clear comparison chart:



The chart above shows that our client (orange bar) has a very high money keyword ratio compared to its competitors. It also has fewer brand keywords than its competitors. With such anchor text ratios, our client is in great danger of being penalized by Google Penguin.

Google states in the Webmaster Quality Guidelines that it does not like optimized anchor text:

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*“Any links intended to manipulate PageRank or a site's ranking in Google search results may be considered part of a link scheme and a violation of Google’s Webmaster Guidelines. This includes (...) links with optimized anchor text in articles or press releases distributed on other sites.”*

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### 1.3.2. Power\*Trust Analysis

The [LRT Power\\*Trust™](#) determines the quality of a website according to its strength and trustworthiness, allowing you to do a quick evaluation of the overall impact of a link.

The more Power\*Trust a website has, the stronger it is. So Power\*Trust 0 websites are the weakest sites, Power\*Trust 100 sites are the strongest ones. If these ratios differ a lot from the ones of the competitors, this seems unnatural. This is something that could trigger a penalty any time.

If you want to avoid a Google penalty, you always need to check the quality of the websites that link to you. Apart from that, you need to see where you stand compared to your greatest competitors. Different niches on the web, have different rules. In the gambling or porn industry,



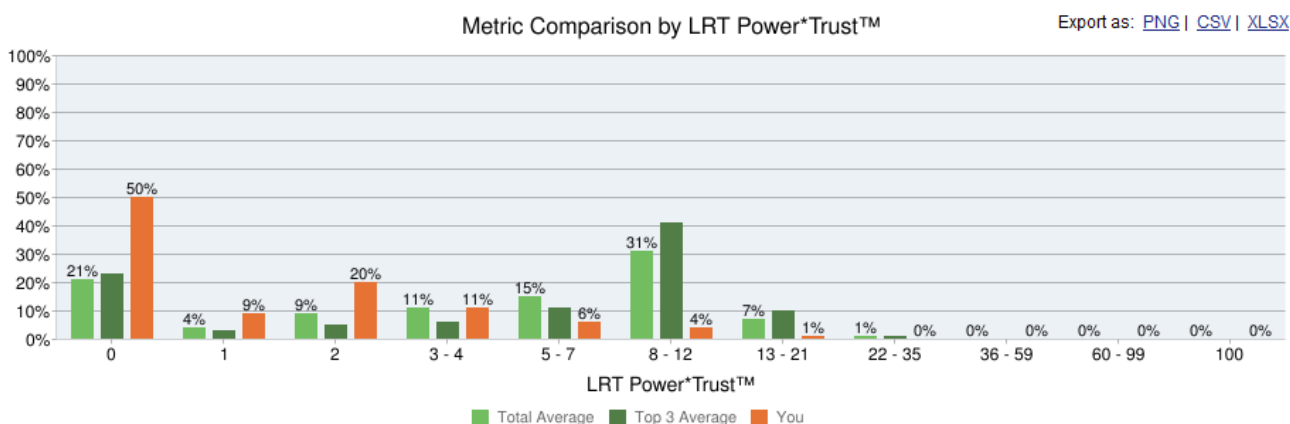
you will not have high Power\*Trust links. Your competitors will not have them either, and that's ok.

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*You need to look at your competitor's backlink profiles, make sure that you blend in and the try to do just a little bit better. You don't want your link profile to stand out in any way.*

---

The following chart shows which percent of a website's links are from websites with 0-100 Power\*Trust.



Here you can see that our client has a huge amount of links from websites with very low Power\*Trust (0/1) and very little from Power\*Trust (8-12/13-21) websites. This may attract a penalty since not only does our client have weak links, it also has more than double than the average percentage the competitors have altogether.

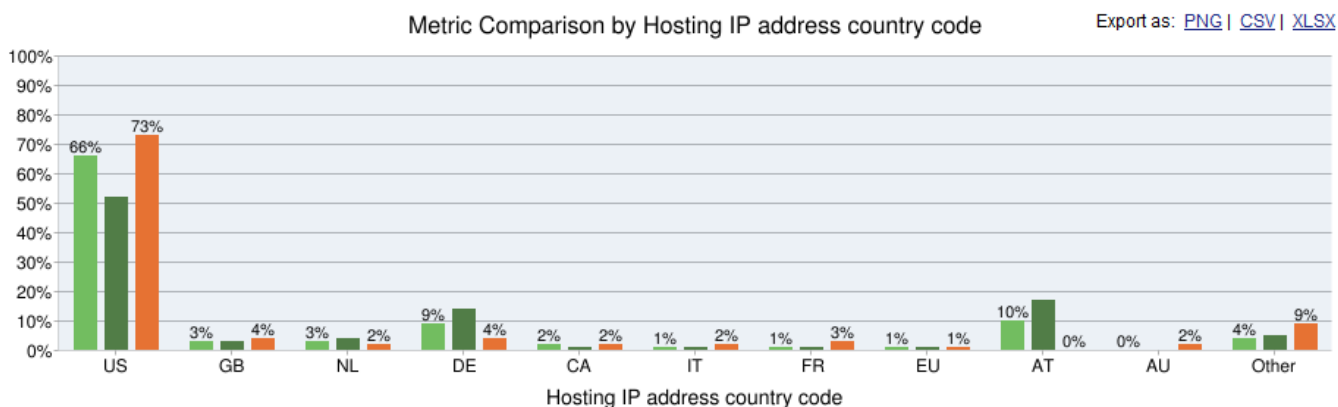
### 1.3.3 Country Analysis

It is important that links are from the right countries (= target markets). You should also keep an eye on a website's country ratio to recognize at an early stage if the website might have been a victim of a Negative SEO attack.

Negative SEO means that someone has launched an organized effort to make your website's link profile look bad. This usually means that someone hit the website with a ton of low-quality or clearly Black Hat links across a large number of domains.

For the most part, these links come from websites hosted in non-target market countries. The reason for having many non-target market links could be a negative SEO attack but not necessarily.

To check the country ratio, you just need the report we've created by using the Competitive Landscape Analyzer (CLA).



In this example, we can see that our client's domain (orange line) has more US and GB links than its competitors, but the difference is quite small.

The metric comparison by hosting IP address country code chart is very useful if you already know some things about your client's target market. Too many links from a country that is irrelevant to the website's business can be a sign of Negative SEO. You need to react fast, check all those links and clean up the risky ones.

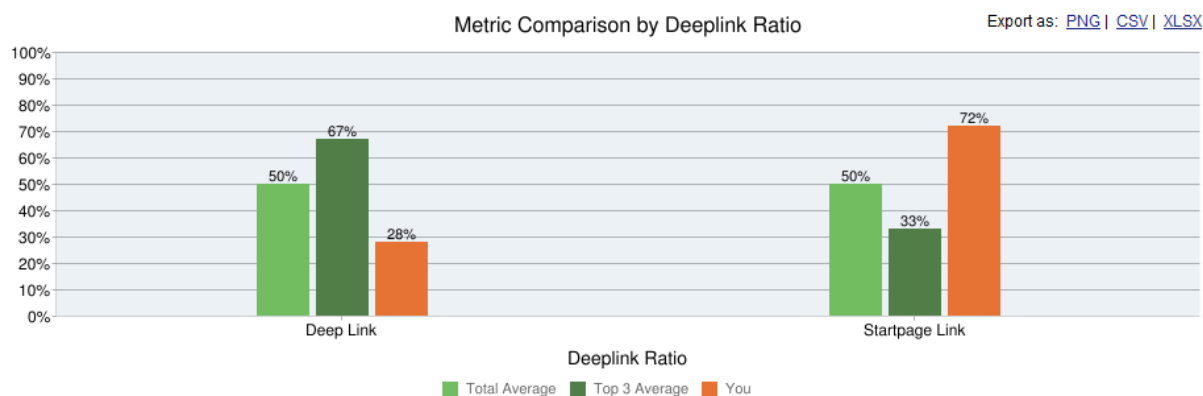
### 1.3.4 Deep Link Ratio Analysis

You don't have to be an SEO guru to know that a site that only gets links to its start page looks a bit suspicious. But is it? And what's the correct ratio?

You can look up your competitors' deep link ratio using Backlink Profiler (BLP) and Competitive Landscape Analyzer (CLA) tools, which provide you with this information in an easy to read the chart.

A high deep-link ratio can be a positive signal for Google, as long as it's natural to have a high deep link ratio in your industry. Deep links can go to content-rich pages, but they can also be the result of a great amount of landing pages containing different promotions.

Ranking drops can be related to the wrong deep link ratios, but as always, it depends on your country, language, keyword, and niche. Unless you have looked at the competition, you never know. Don't believe the generalized hype.



In this chart from the Competitive Landscape Analyzer (CLA), you can see that the client's website possesses far less deep links than start page links. Our client needs to focus on building more deep links to diminish the discrepancy between his website's backlink profile and his competitors.

### 1.3.5 Link Status Analysis

According to their link status, links can be Follow, NoFollow, Redirects, Mentions or Canonicals.

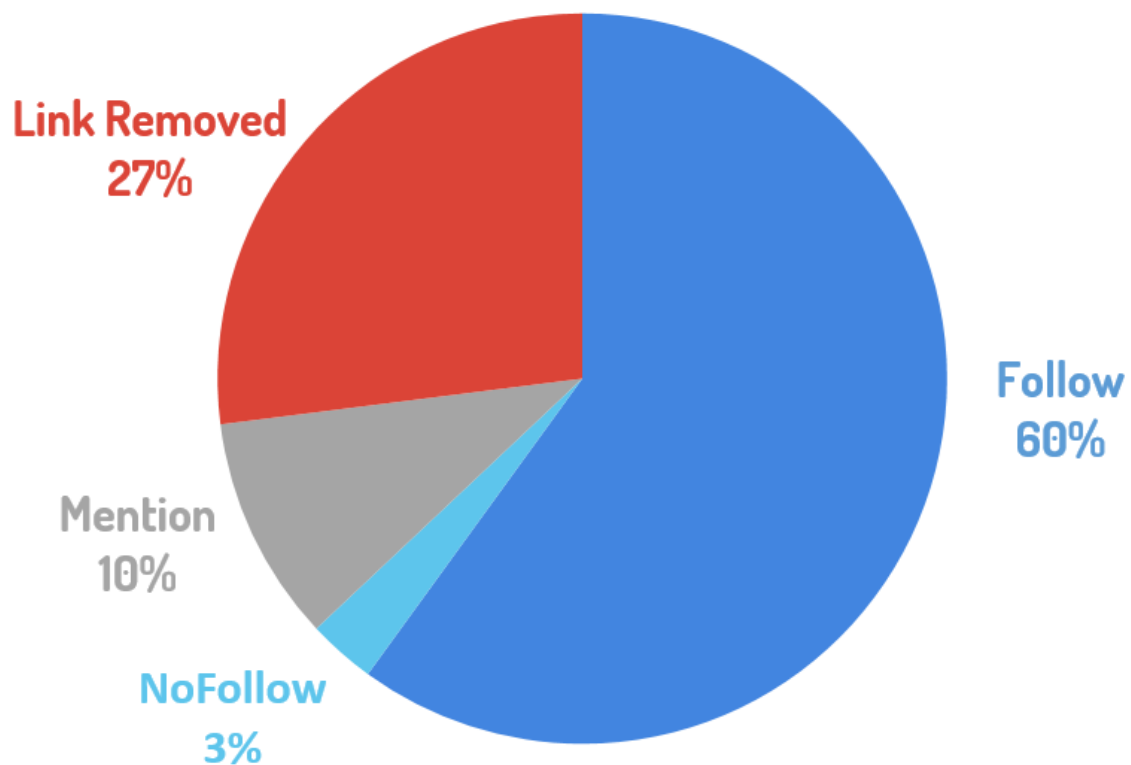
If you want to stay out of trouble, you need to keep an eye on the kind of links you have. Have in mind that you also need to blend in with your top competitors if you want to outrank them. In some web niches, a high percentage of NoFollow links is not alarming. Not as long as your high-ranking competitors have similar NoFollow ratios. Sites that have only Follow links look highly unnatural and can get devalued by Google. Most normal sites have a mixture of Follow and NoFollow links.

The **"NoFollow" link status** provides a way for webmasters to tell search engines "don't follow links on this page."

In general, Google does not follow these "NoFollow" links. This means that Google does not transfer PageRank or anchor text across these links. Therefore, NoFollow links do not transmit power. Still, we believe that they transmit trust. If you think of Wikipedia links, for instance, experience has shown that – although they are NoFollow - have a positive effect on a website's link profile.

Keep an eye on your NoFollow links since the Google spam team mentioned them as a penalty reason.

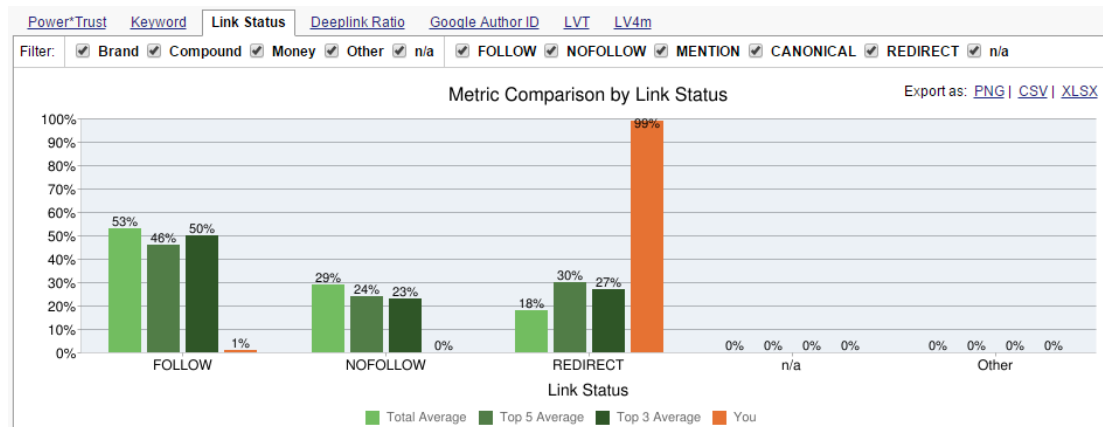
#### LINKS TO DOMAINS THAT WERE CLASSIFIED AS SPAM EXAMPLES BY GOOGLE



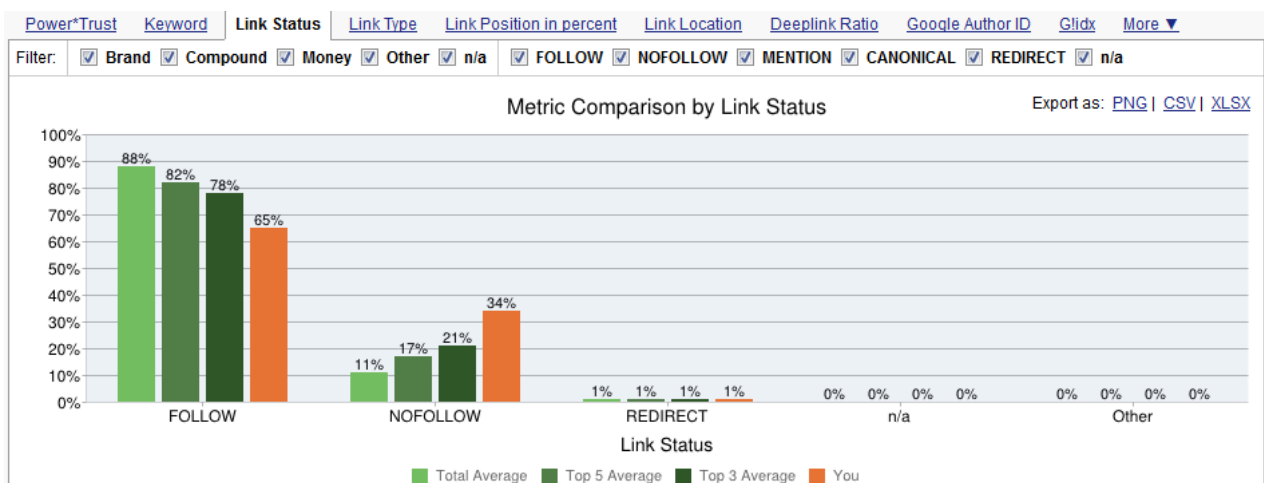
You can read more about NoFollow links in this research written by Christoph C. Cemper. [Can NoFollow Links Put Your Website at Risk?](#)

**“Follow” links**, have the contrary effect. A website’s Follow ratio should be as high as the competitor’s Follow ratio. You can do a quick link status check using the Competitive Landscape Analyzer (CLA).

You do not want your backlink profile to have 1% Follow links and 99% redirects. Especially not when your competitor’s backlink profiles look completely normal.



Websites need to have a mix of Follow and NoFollow links to look natural. A link profile with a ratio of 100% Follow links will look highly unnatural and can get devalued by Google. The same goes for websites that stand out with too many NoFollow links.



### 1.3.6 Link Location Analysis

By looking deeper into a backlink profile, you can understand why the link location is important. The Competitive Landscape Analyzer (CLA) allows you to compare your links to your competitors, based on link location. For example, you don't want to stand out with too many widget links. That may attract a penalty.

Depending on the location of the links on a website, there are different link types:

- **InContent Link** = a link that is surrounded by text
- **Paragraph Link** = paragraph linking is a way to lead readers to a destination in a certain essay, making writing more smooth and coherent. This means making connections between different paragraphs in an essay to make your writing logical.
- **Link List** = a link located on a page that merely only contains links to other pages.
- **Footer Links** = the "Footer" is the bottom of the page, so "footer links" are the links at the bottom of the page.
- **Sidebar Link** = a link located in a sidebar, usually without being surrounded by text
- **Header** = link located in the header of a page
- **Comment Link** = links in forums and/or blog comments
- **Widget Link** = link located in a widget

### 1.3.7 Link Type Analysis

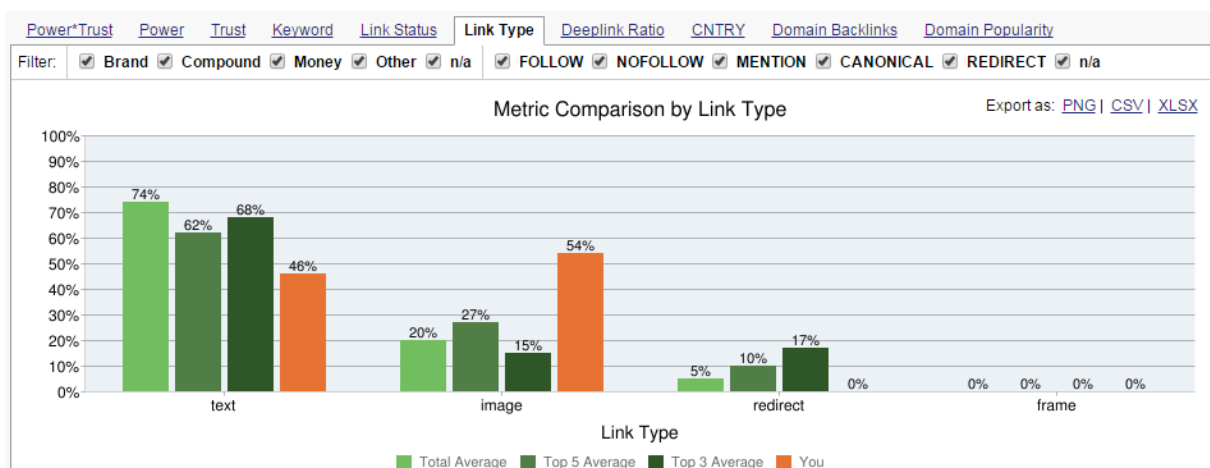
Links can be text links, image links, frames, redirects, mentions, etc.

Most successful sites have a mixture of different link types. If you analyze your competitors, you can see the typical link type ratios of the domains that are ranking on the first page of Google.

Why do you need to look at Link Type ratios?

The domains that Google lists on the first search results page have similar link type ratios. If your domain does not have a similar ratio to your SERP competitor's domains, it could look unnatural to Google. You must aim to have similar link type ratios to your competitors that rank for similar keywords, in your language and your country.

Compare your backlinks with your competitors and research the most natural link profile for your keyword. A huge number of image links or redirects could result in a sneaky SEO campaign.



Depending on the location of the links on a website, there are different link types:

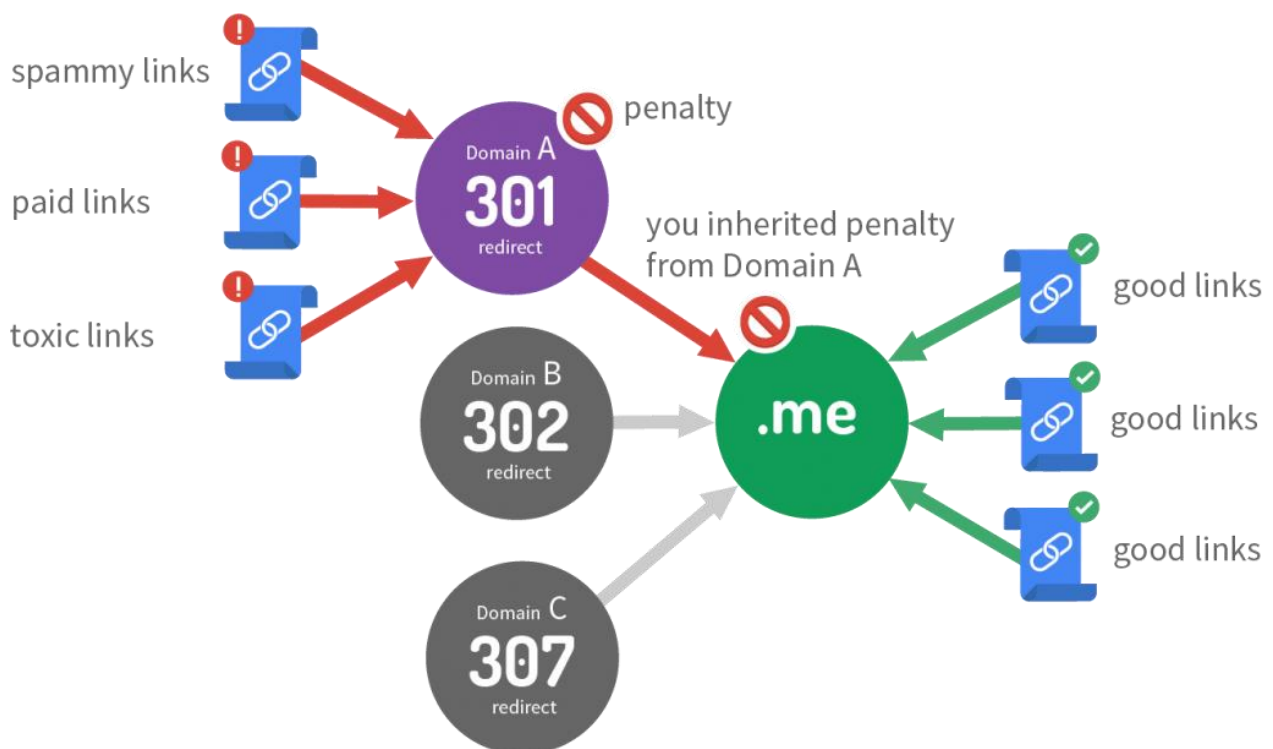
- **Text link** = an element of text on a web page, which can be used to access other web pages.
- **Image link** = an image, which can be used to access other web pages.
- **Redirect link** = a link (text or image) that is pointing to website A while the whole website A redirects to website B and, therefore, transmit all the link juice to website B.

### Think twice when you make redirects, some may pass Google Penalties

Redirects are a good way to use the link juice from links of old or non-active projects (=websites) to boost a current project (=website). Redirected domains always have to be on-topic regarding the receiving domain. Links from redirected domains should only be a small percentage of the new website's total amount of links.

For example, 302 redirects pass rankings and also pass penalties since 2013. In the past, there was this SEO trick that you could redirect a domain and get all the positive link juice, all the benefits while leaving the penalties behind.

All that changed in 2013 with the Penguin 2.0. That means that all kinds of satellite domains or domains you bought for SEO and redirected in the past may have passed on penalties. Your site may have good links, but those redirected may pass a penalty. You need to run a [Link Detox](#) for each redirected domain.



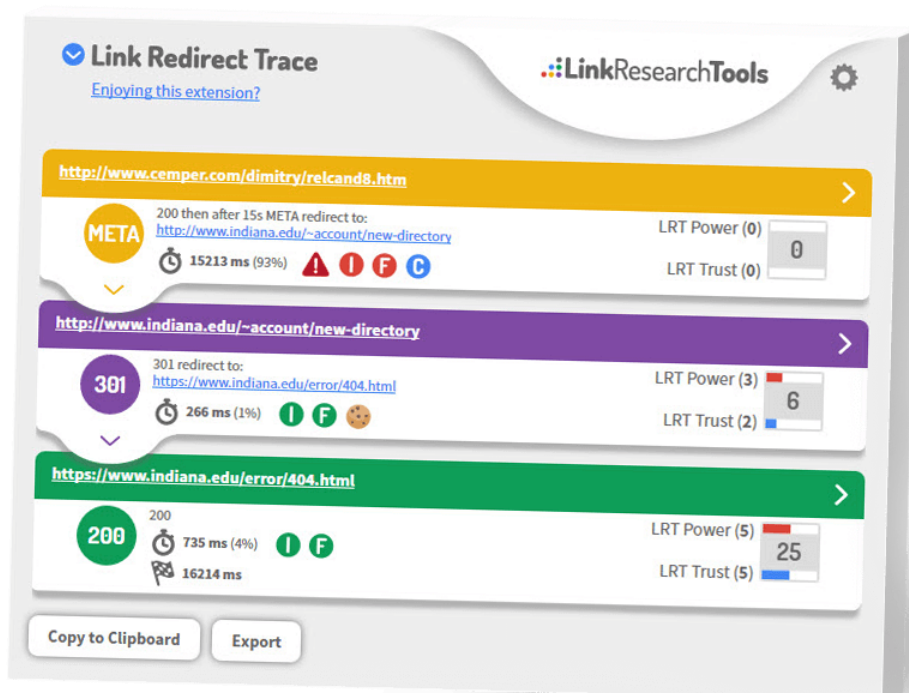
With the [Link Redirect Trace extension](#), you can easily trace redirect paths right in your browser. If a strange domain is redirecting to you, you should check this in more detail and find out if this is a valuable website or if it is harming you.

Here's what the Link Redirect Trace Extension does for you:

- detects every link redirect hop
- shows you the LRT Power\*Trust per Link Redirect hop
- analyzes robots.txt for every hop
- analyzes HTML <head> NoIndex, NoFollow per redirect hop
- analyzes the HTTP header X-Robots NoIndex, NoFollow, NoArchive
- shows cookies set for each redirect hop – understand those affiliate ad links.
- [...and more](#)

The Link Redirect Trace Extension can help you discover On-page and Off-page SEO issues, track a hacker website redirect, check links after a website migration or redesign and more.

You can [download the Link Redirect Trace extension](#) for free. We are pretty sure that you're going to love it!





## 1.3.8 Link Velocity Trend Ratios

The growth of backlink profiles over time is very important for Google since the Search Engine looks at backlink profiles and growth of backlink profiles over time.

If Google cares, you need to care as well! It is imperative that you understand the natural link growth patterns in your niche to be able to compete with other players.

Link Velocity refers to the growth or decline of links over time.

- $\text{Link Velocity} = \frac{\text{Change in number of links}}{\text{time period}}$
- $\text{Link Velocity}_{\text{example}} = \frac{100 \text{ new links}}{\text{month}}$

LinkResearchTools measures link growth for you, using the link velocity metric.

Link velocity describes the speed of link growth to a page or domain. Link velocity trends describe the trends of link growth, i.e. how fast or slow the link growth to a page or domain is in a given time span. Depending on the time window you're looking at these can be different trend indicators. Typical time windows to look at for link velocity are a month, quarter, half-year, full-year or two years.

How can looking at link velocity trends help you?

You can use the Competitive Landscape Analyzer (CLA) of the Competitive Link Velocity (CLV) tool to see the Link Velocity Trends of your domain compared with your competitors. Your goal is to understand: what link growth is 'natural' in your niche, for your keyword, for your country.

You can easily spot link growth and link decline trends by looking at the heatmap charts in the [Competitive Link Velocity \(CLV\)](#) tool.

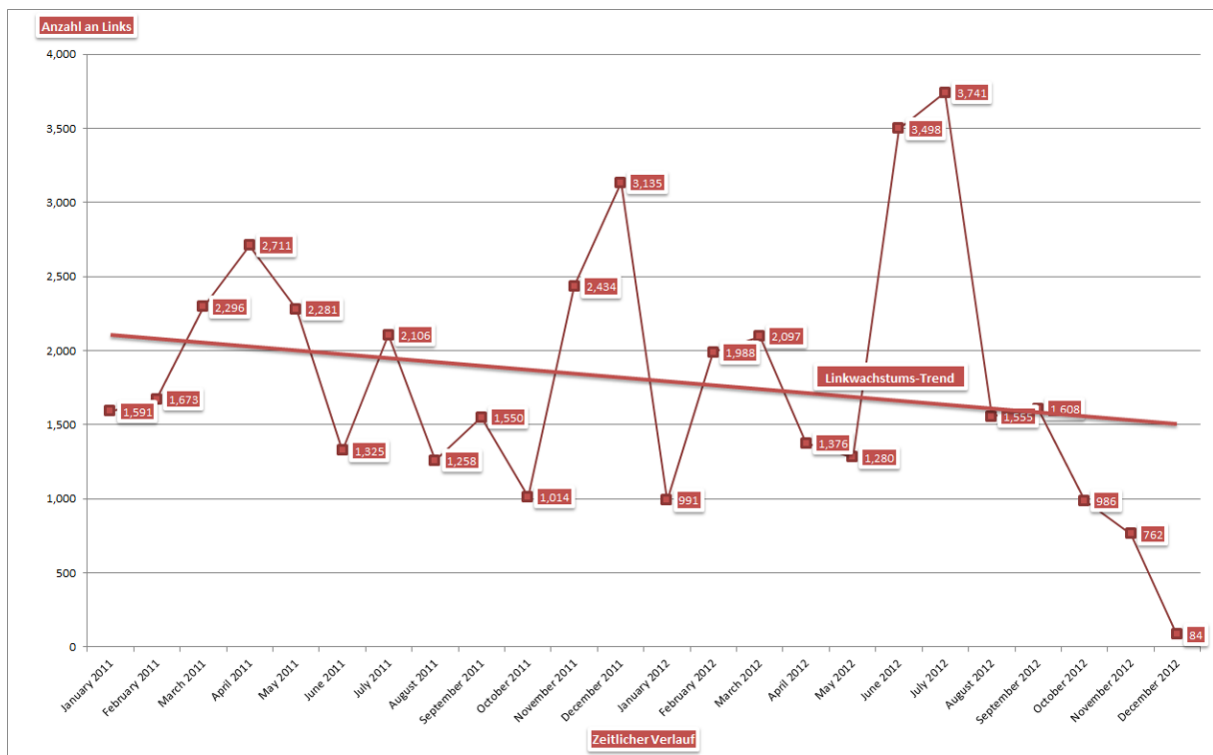
All linking pages		2014												2015												2016											
Domains		Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug												
<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">meyertax.com</a> (128)																																				
<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">deloitte.com</a> (743,828)																																				
<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">pwc.com</a> (542,951)																																				
<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">kpmg.com</a> (678,831)																																				
<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">accenture.com</a> (816,008)																																				

Select all Domains     
 Select domains for further actions     
 Heatmap relative to  all domains /  your domain

By looking at the link velocity trends, you can discover:

- Links from domains that are paid link networks
- Links from domains that are dying
- Links from domains that are “hype.”

The Link Velocity Trends technology developed by LinkResearchTools helped spot Penguin problems since April 2012. Here is an example of a negative Link Velocity Trend. You don't want your link profile to look like that.



### 1.3.9 Detect partial Penguin 4.0 penalties with Subfolder and Subpages analysis

In the official announcement of the Google Penguin 4.0 roll out, Google pointed out what's different about this Penguin update. Apart from the real-time aspect, Google Penguin is also more granular.

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*“Penguin is now more granular. Penguin now devalues spam by adjusting ranking based on spam signals, rather than affecting the ranking of the whole site.”*

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Many webmasters ask themselves what does “granularity” mean? The fact that Google Penguin will be more granular means that now Google will not necessarily penalize a website as a whole, but it can also penalize only parts of it. Google can penalize a domain, a sub-directory, a group of keywords or just a page. So anything that goes into the organic rankings will now be affected by the Penguin algorithm on a fine level.

You can have a penalty only for a part of your website, while before a Google Penguin filter affected the entire domain.

Link Detox (DToX) can help detect unnatural links on a Subfolder and Subpage level. You will need to check certain parts of your website more often than the others and manage the risk of your links even on a daily basis.

Here are some examples on where you can use the subfolder analysis to avoid triggering a Google Penguin filter:

- Monitor subfolders that contain User Generated Content (UGC), as they can contain spammy comments or posts.
- E-commerce: if you run a typical e-commerce website you will have various subfolders for each product category. You can assess individual categories for their [DToXRISK](#).
- Blog vs. product: if you have a blog subfolder on your product website, you need to make a separate risk assessment for the blog, since links to the blog are likely to come from other sources than for general product pages.

- Homepage: many websites have most of their links point to their homepage. This makes a separate analysis worthwhile, especially when your content and deep links are just as big.



Doing a competitive research using [Competitive Link Detox \(CDTOX\)](#) for every main topic a site covers is also very important if you want to understand different risk level standards in your niche.

## 1.4 Clean your backlink profile

Harmful links are not easy to find. For example, the link itself looks natural; the website also seems OK, but maybe it is part of a big link network. Imagine you have to review 1000s of links! You need a tool that tells you straight away what the risks are. You need professional off-page SEO tools, and that is where [Link Detox](#) comes into play.

Based on many different link [rules](#), the tool proves each backlink algorithmically. It tells you why a link is considered healthy or unhealthy. The world isn't just black or white. There is also a big gray zone when it comes to backlinks. Link Detox also tells you if a particular link has a very low, low, moderate, high or very high risk.

You can quickly audit your backlink profile, create a disavow file, upload it to Google Search Console and make Google take notice of it fast. Read more about the link audit process in **Chapter 2**.

## 1.5 Link Risk Management (something vital for your online business)

Recovering from a Google Penguin penalty once doesn't immunize your website against future penalties. In fact, many of the penalties imposed by Penguin were a long time coming — and this suggests that there's a lot more to come. Thus, webmasters must be conscientious, actively monitoring their sites' ongoing link growth for anything that might be considered as “spammy”

or “unnatural.” While a suspicious inbound link may not trigger a warning now, that doesn’t mean it won’t in the future — all Google has to do is flip a switch.

Risk management for your links is both an ongoing process and a mindset. While there are tools out there that can help you identify “risky” links, running these tools and disavowing the suspicious links is by no means a “one and done” kind of deal.

We’re not talking about a singular event where you clean up your old sins and are safe for the future — risk management for SEO and links entails assessing the risk of potential *new* links, as well. After all, if you have acquired “bad” links in the past through active link building efforts, you don’t want to risk additional harm to your site by continuing to build similar “bad” links.

Plus you need to have in mind Negative SEO. With the Real Time Penguin, the risk of a Negative SEO attack is much higher. It can be targeted now to a certain page on a website or a subfolder. You don’t want the page from which you have most sales to drop in rankings.

### 1.5.1 What is Link Risk Management?

Link risk management is a natural outgrowth of the changes that have affected SEO in the last few years. SEO is not just an investment in better visibility and higher rankings. SEO is the primary way to protect your Internet “assets.” Unfortunately, just like in most other spheres of life, people tend to wait for something bad to happen before they do something to protect themselves.

Do you want to go through all the stress, time, and cost of recovering your site from a Google penalty? Our advice would be, “better safe than sorry.”

You can insure your home or your car against damage, but how do you protect your organic web traffic? Link risk management is one of the ways you can ensure your organic traffic — and the income that results from it — against Penguin-related damage.

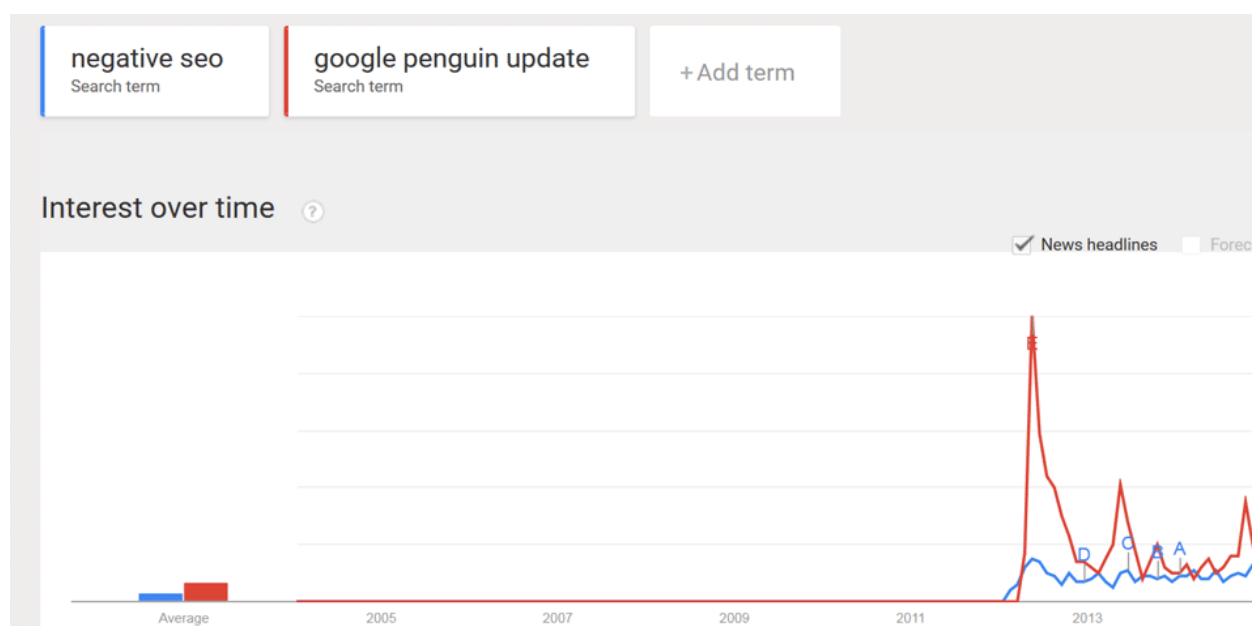
#### **Link risk management includes:**

1. Recovering your site from a Google penalty (if necessary).
2. Protecting it from bad backlinks and “negative SEO.”
3. Building safe backlinks.
4. Making steps 2 and 3 a continuous process.

## 1.5.2 What is Negative SEO and how it can harm your website?

With the launch of the Google Penguin algorithm, a malicious SEO tactic was born. It's called Negative SEO. In this Google Trends query, we can see how "Negative SEO" searches kicked off right with the first Google Penguin hitting the SEO world.

This evil practice is designed to ruin your competitor's rankings by maliciously building thousands of links to their site with over optimized money anchor text.



Matt Cutts mentioned the subject of Negative SEO at the SMX Advanced Conference in Seattle, June 2012. Matt's answer wasn't quite what everybody wanted to hear:

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*"People have asked questions about Negative SEO for a long time. Our guidelines used to say it's nearly impossible to do that, but there have been cases where that's happened, so we changed the wording on that part of our guidelines."*

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In 2013, John Mueller was asked in a Google Webmaster Hangout if someone can affect your site by building unnatural links to it. His reply was:

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*“With negative SEO, most people mean that a competitor is creating bad links for your website...we work hard to prevent these things from causing any problems. We work hard on our algorithms to try to recognize these kinds of problems and catch them ahead of time. In practice, I rarely see any issues around that and when I do see an issue where I think that maybe this is created by a competitor then usually the team is willing to look into the details and see what happened there and make sure that this isn't an issue that is artificially causing problems for a website.”*

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Later on, in the Google Webmaster Hangout, John was asked how Google would know if someone else, with a Negative SEO intent, was purchasing unnatural links. John replied:

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*“It's a tricky situation and not something where I'd say that we can guarantee that we always get it 100% right. But, from the cases I've looked at, I think we've done a pretty good job.”*

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It seems that while we can't guarantee that Google is going to be 100% right, Negative SEO is a real threat. Now it's more important than ever to monitor your backlink profile.

Most people associate negative SEO with “bad backlinks” and that is true, but just partially. There are much more negative SEO techniques such as content scraping, server sabotage or penalty redirections.

There are multiple reasons:

- negative SEO is easier, cheaper, faster and more efficient than natural SEO;
- attackers are experienced SEOs who know what they are doing;
- Google can protect you from some sneaky tricks, but just have in mind that negative SEO can spread over a longer period and use complex techniques to bring down a website for good.

Cleaning up the backlink profile can bring a cure after a Google Penalty and will help you recover your site. However, you should keep in mind that cleaning up is not enough. Recovering from a

Penguin Penalty once doesn't immunize your website against future Penalties. Also, just because you got away without a Penalty in the past, it does not mean that you can't get hit in the future.

There are three main aspects that you shouldn't forget:

1. You get new risky backlinks every day.
2. Negative SEO is a real threat.
3. Google will never stop improving its algorithm.

Thus, webmasters must conscientiously monitor their sites' ongoing link growth for anything that might be considered "spammy" or "unnatural." The fact that a suspicious inbound link does not trigger a warning now doesn't mean it will not in the future — all Google has to do is flip a switch.

Link risk management is both an **ongoing process and shift in your mindset**. Although there are programs out there that can help you identify "risky" links, running such tools and disavowing suspicious links is by no means a "one-and-done" kind of deal.

We're not talking about a singular event where you clean up your old sins and be safe forever. Link Risk Management means assessing the risk of potential *new* links just as well.

After all, if you have acquired "bad" links in the past through active link building efforts, you don't want to risk harming your site even more by continuing to build similarly "bad" links.

## 1.6 Protect your website

Just like with any insurance, you hope that you never need insurance against Google Penalties, but it's better to be prepared than not. For webmasters, the "insurance policy" is to protect your site from the possibility of Google penalties — versus trying to recover from one.

The only way to keep your website safe and Penguin-proof is by proactively engaging in proper link risk management. This means keeping track of your backlink profile, regularly checking it for new links and removing or disavowing the spammy ones.

There are many reasons why you should constantly monitor the risk level of your backlink profile:

- Even if you have successfully recovered from a Google penalty, your site is not immune to new Google penalties.
- Your site gets new backlinks every day, and many of them come from bad neighborhoods.



- Despite some controversy, Negative SEO is real and is happening all the time. Someone determined enough to hurt you can destroy your reputation with Google — and thus, your organic traffic.

## 1.7 Further reading on how to protect your website against a Google Penalty:

1. [The Power of Link Risk Management in the Real Time Penguin Era](#) – case study by Stefano Robbi
2. [How to Prevent a Google Penguin Penalty](#) – case study by Harry Tschuggnall
3. [How Can the Granular Real Time Penguin Affect Your Website](#) – a blog post by Christoph C. Cemper
4. [How to Create a Google-Penalty-Proof Website with LRT](#) – case study by Florian Hieß
5. [Why is Link Risk Management vital?](#) – case study by Arda Mendes
6. [Negative SEO Protection Techniques](#) – a blog post by Christoph C. Cemper
7. [Things You Didn't Know About Your Old Backlinks](#) – a blog post by Christoph C. Cemper
8. [Competitive Domain Analysis with LinkResearchTools](#) – a case study by Tom Black

## 2. How to recover from a Google Penguin penalty?



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Google Penguin recovery strategy and site audit tips.

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## 2.1 Recovery Strategy

The key to a successful link audit and long lasting recovery resides in achieving colossal volumes of link discovery from the outset. By establishing a complete backlink history to audit, you will achieve higher rankings upon recovery and provide the client with a stable website platform to rebuild on. You have to [find all the skeletons in the closet](#).

In summary, you need to apply the following attitude and methodology to the recovery strategy:

- Background research: Call the client to discover what tactics had been employed to build links. This can help the manual review process for spotting toxic links and negative SEO.
- Experienced auditing: It's vital the person auditing your site is highly knowledgeable in all forms of SEO as well as the software tools required. Don't turn to cheap labor; it can do you more harm than good. A good \$5 website audit doesn't exist, and you shouldn't trust your online business in the hands of wannabe SEOs or scammers.
- Meticulous auditing: Link Detox provides a robust platform for a well-educated SEO to spend some serious time manually evaluating, categorizing and diagnosing a toxic link profile.
- Intelligent removal: The cost of removing good links is huge to both the clients' rankings and the financial investment of post removal to replace the lost power and trust. The preservation of good links is of the utmost importance.
- Isolating negative SEO: One good thing we can say about negative SEO is that it tends to stick out like a saw thumb in a link profile. As soon as the audit is complete, we always advise the instant submission of a disavow file and Link Detox Boost to clear off obvious issues.
- Speed & results driven removal: Focus on eradicating toxic backlinks as fast as physically possible.

## 2.2 Link Audit

A vital part of any recovery is a very detailed and accurate link audit.

Key Audit Goals:

- classify all the anchor texts, so it's categorized into Brand, Compound, Money or Other;
- manually work through the entire Link Detox report and audit all backlinks;

- preserve all good backlinks pointing to the client’s website to maintain rankings post-recovery – this also helps the client to understand what they SHOULD be doing following the lift of the penalty.

## 2.2.1 Collect all your backlinks

Did you build links in the past or did you hire an SEO or an agency to do it for you? Then for sure you have some risky backlinks pointing to your website. Google cares about your old backlinks and so should you.

A good basis for a good website audit is gathering data from as many link sources as possible. In case you have a list of links that you built in the past, it is highly recommended to analyze these links as well. The more data you add, the more accurate your results. Try to create a comprehensive backlink profile to make sure you look at the biggest piece of the cake.

LinkResearchTools gives you the chance to see the FULL picture of your backlink profile.

We pull link data from 24 different link sources including MajesticSEO, Ahrefs, SEMrush, Moz, Google Analytics, Facebook, Twitter and more.

The best part is that we also allow you to connect your Google Search Console account to LinkResearchTools. In this way, you always have the latest links from Google Search Console included in your reports. No need to upload them manually every time.

If you have older link lists, no problem. You can upload all that to LinkResearchTools. We will bring all your link data together for you and we add much more to it.

## 2.2.2 Analyze your backlinks

The Link Audit is certainly the most difficult part of the disavow process, but it’s important that you take your time with it. Only trust a real professional to do this for you. You don’t want to end up with your good links disavowed. It can get even worse; you may end up with all your links disavowed. Your rankings will be damaged either way.

Only trust a true professional to do the link audits for you. And have in mind that this is not a one-time job. Someone needs to do this on a regular basis. You can get a bunch of spammy links overnight as a result of a negative SEO attack.

Toxic links can attract a Google Penalty. You don’t want any weak, risky links pointing to your website. This might trigger a Google Penguin filter or may bring a Manual Action upon your website. That is why you carefully need to analyze every single link. The analysis is not a huge

job if you have just a hundred backlinks. You can check each one manually, taking note of which ones come from spammy or irrelevant sites.

Before you even start analyzing your backlinks, you should learn which links violate [Google's Webmaster Guidelines](#) on linking. After that, you can start with your personal analysis.

The problem gets serious when you have thousands — or even millions — of backlinks. Link Detox helps automate this process by showing you what percentage of your links are risky and potentially hurting your rankings. The risk of each link is measured by Link Detox Risk (DToXRISK) as well as your overall domain-wide DToXRISK.

A Link Detox report will immediately display your Domain DToXRISK rating and level. It is important to know if the backlinks you have are risky and that you clean them up as soon as possible.

### 2.2.3 Outreach for link removal

For proper link removal outreach, you first need to create a persona. It can be the 'the business owner' as you can play on certain emotional strings as well as separating your persona from negativity around SEO and SEO agencies. By doing this, you can portray that you (the business owner) are taking the backlink clean-up very seriously because you're handling it personally. When you reach out to a webmaster you should:

- Explain, in brief, the damage done to your business (don't be a baby, just explain how your traffic/business has suffered).
- Claim ignorance that the 'SEO Company' was using tactics you didn't know were bad.

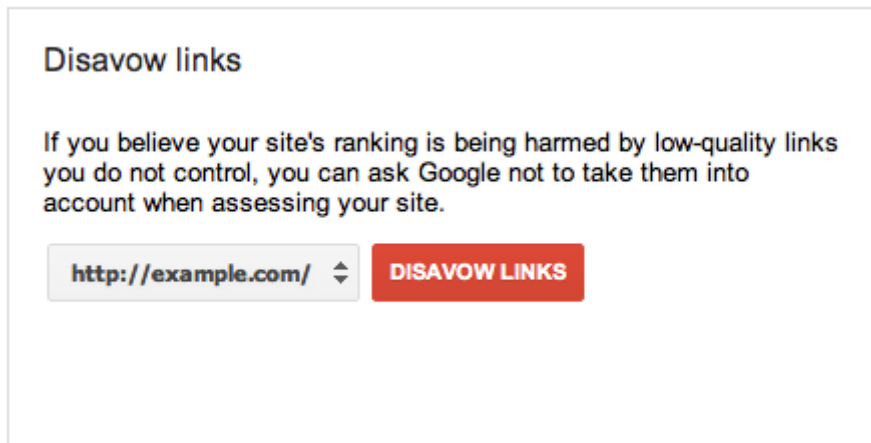
### 2.2.4 Upload the disavow file to Google Search Console

Even if you use a great outreach method, there will be some webmasters that will not answer reply to your link removal request. That is why Google created a Disavow Tool in 2012 already.

Link Detox automatically creates a disavow file for you with all the links that you tag with "Disavow." All you need to do is upload it to the Google Disavow Tool.

When you try to upload your disavow file, you will be overwhelmed with warning messages by Google. However, this should not intimidate you. If you went through a thorough Link Audit before, there is nothing to be scared of.

1. Select the domain you want to upload a disavow file for.



2. Click on “DISAVOW LINKS.”
3. Confirm the warning message that the Disavow Links Tool is a tool that can cause serious damage if used incorrectly (see screenshot). To confirm click again on “Disavow Links.”

## Disavow Links

This is an advanced feature and should only be used with caution. If used incorrectly, this feature can potentially harm your site's performance in Google's search results. We recommend that you only disavow backlinks if you believe that there are a considerable number of spammy, artificial, or low-quality links pointing to your site, and if you are confident that the links are causing issues for you.

Disavow Links

Once you passed that hurdle too, the Disavow Tool will confirm your upload immediately.

After you uploaded your Disavow file to Google, you should wait 48 hours and then run [Link Detox Boost](#).

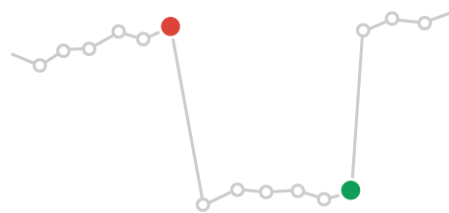
### 2.2.5 Don't wait for Google to re-crawl your links

Should you wait for Google to re-crawl your links? The answer is no. Playing the waiting game with Google is always frustrating. No matter if you have an algorithmic or manual penalty.

You can make Google take notice of your disavow file after you uploaded it to Google Search Console. Link Detox Boost speeds link indexation and your recovery from a Google Penalty.

Your website may have a lot of spammy links (like forum profile links on some long abandoned forum or link directory). Link Detox helps you find these links; you can disavow them, but there is a good chance that these links have a very low crawl rate. That means you will be waiting a very long time before you can see any changes in your search engine rankings.

We built Link Detox Boost to help you push the Google bot into re-crawling the low-quality links you have already asked Google to disavow.



### Google Penalties take forever! Problem: Google is TOO SLOW!

If you are like the thousands of webmasters who suffered from a Google Penalty (whether it was an algorithmic filter like from the Google Penguin updates or a manual action penalty), then you will know by now how frustrating it can be to play the waiting game with Google.

Even after you have done everything “by the book” according to Google’s recommendations and uploading your disavow files, waiting for Google not to count all the bad links that are hurting your rankings can be a very slow and painful process.

You have a business to run and waiting for Google is just not an option anymore. Google specifically advised webmasters to use the Disavow tool to clean up and disavow links, but the problem is that Google Disavow does not work fast unless you boost it.

Even Google admits that:

It may take some time for Google to process the information you've uploaded. In particular, this information will be incorporated into our index as we recrawl the web and reprocess the pages that we see, which can take a number of weeks. These links will continue to be shown in the Webmaster Tools inbound links section.

<https://support.google.com/webmasters/answer/2648487?hl=en>

The important parts are highlighted above, “As we re-crawl the web,” and this “Can take a number of weeks.” Even though Google makes this statement, Google will only show 20% of the links in the Google Search Console. Therefore, it’s so crucial to combine as many available data sources in your link analysis.

You have to understand that Google is just a machine. Yes, it’s a very large and complex computer system programmed by humans using algorithms, but it’s still only a machine. There are priorities in every machine. And while Google is a large corporation, it’s still not God.

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## *You can speed up your Google Penalty recovery using Link Detox Boost*

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We have seen many Google penalty recovery stories. One of our customers even [reversed a Manual Action in a few days](#). Our customers also confirmed that Link Detox Boost also works on algorithmic penalties. If your site has lost its ranking due to a Google Penguin update, Boost will help you recover your website from your Algorithmic Penalty (aka filter).

The client disavowed ~40% of his links on Friday, got the Domain-wide Link Detox Risk (Domain DTOXRISK™) down to 207, ran Link Detox Boost on Monday, and had an almost instant jump of 20 positions.

<b>todd</b>		
Good mooring. I am running a test on Boost for a site that does not have a manual penalty. I did a detox end of last week. I ran a boost yesterday and already moved up 20 spots.		14:13
Christoph C. Cemper @cemper.com		
WOW.		21:20
Awesome. Congrats.		21:20
<b>todd</b>		
thanks		21:21
Christoph C. Cemper @cemper.com		
How many % links did u disavow?		21:21
can we do a success/recovery story about this in a few dys?		21:21
<b>todd</b>		
disavowed 40% of the links		21:22
got the risk down to 207		21:22
no manual action		21:23

**Please note:** Link Detox Boost is not a magic wand. You must remove or disavow all bad links for Boost to work. If you do not, Google will see the same offending links and not remove your penalty. That is why Boost is only effective when used after a thorough link audit.



Whether you built a lot of spammy links in the past or hired someone who has done a lot of dirty SEO work to your site (like forum profile links on some long abandoned forum or link directory), then there is a good chance that these links have a very low crawl rate. That means you will be waiting a very long time before you can see any changes in your search engine rankings.

In short, the problem is that the **Googlebot is lazy** when it comes to re-crawling the bad links you disavowed. Googlebot is very active on high-quality sites that they deem to be High Quality or High Authority, but those low-quality links you added to your disavow file weren't crawled well in the first place. If you have ever followed spammy link building practices or hired an SEO, who did that to your website, then you will know what we mean.

These low-quality links will not be detected until Googlebot comes around, and nobody knows "when" that will be.

This is why we built the advanced Link Detox Boost tool to help you push the Googlebot into re-crawling the low-quality links you have already asked Google to disavow. The Googlebot needs to re-crawl these low-quality links fast or else you will be waiting a very long time before you notice any changes.

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### *Link Detox Boost helps you do proper link risk management*

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Google recommends pro-active link disavow. If you have some bad links in your profile today, and you can't sleep because those links are hurting your search engine rankings and your business, then feel free to disavow those bad links ASAP. This describes the process of [Link Risk Management](#) that we have always recommended.

If you have uploaded your disavow file and your website traffic has not returned to its former glory, then there is a good chance that a couple of things might have happened. Either the disavow process is not fully completed yet, OR not all the bad links you disavowed have been re-crawled.

This process can take a very long time. Uploading all of the bad links to the Google Disavow tool does work, but the time you have to wait for Google to re-crawl the bad links is painfully slow. You will probably notice that the links are never read even after waiting a full month.

## 2.2.6 Avoid doing link audit mistakes

Every day we talk to clients about using Link Detox and LinkResearchTools for their link audits. It is self-service software. We often hear from customers that they decided to go for “an outsourced solution” that is so much cheaper for the full service – i.e. some Link Detox credits and the full audit, plus webmaster contacting, plus follow-up plus good-night sleep for the next months and years to come.

That sounds like – “too good to be true.” And we’re afraid it appears many fall for the dream that a link audit is a cheap, quick fix done by some cheap labor offshore worker that has a \$99 starter plan and uses a \$10 credit to provide a \$15 service. Yes. The total labor cost for the full audit is \$5.

If it sounds too good to be true, it often is. And shortcutting your responsibility to take care of your backlink profile that way certainly is not recommended.

Christoph C. Cemper put together an interesting list of typical scams, frauds or simply incompetence we’ve seen from “cheap labor” workers. Read his post about [5 Types of Managed Link Audit Mistakes and their FIX](#).

## 2.3 Link monitoring

New links can either come naturally through real users who give recommendations (=links), through your SEO agency or - worst-case scenario – from a negative SEO attack from your competitors. In all cases, incoming links have to be tracked and checked if they are not affecting the balance of your link profile and if they do not harm your website in the sense of triggering a Google Penguin Penalty.

LinkResearchTools offers an easy solution for monitoring your backlink profile. By setting up [Link Alerts](#), you get alerted via e-mail as soon as the tool finds new links for your website.

It’s very important to check your backlinks daily since you might become a victim of a negative SEO attack. Negative SEO occurs when someone makes an attempt to lower your website’s rankings. In most cases, this attempt is link based.

Back in the days, if competitors wanted to hurt their rivals’ websites, they just built 1000s of automatic generated spammy links and pointed them to the rivals’ websites. In the meantime, Google became clever enough to identify these plump attempts as negative SEO and made sure that these links don't affect the target website’s rankings.

But negative SEO can also be much more subtle and smart. Therefore, it is always necessary to check your new incoming links and to see if there are any suspect patterns.

Learn more about protecting your website from negative SEO in this article: [Negative SEO protection techniques](#).

## 2.4 Google penalty deep-dive case studies

Here are some online resources that talk about Google Penguin penalties, Google Manual Actions, and successful penalty recoveries.

1. [3 Great Google Penalty Recovery Stories](#) – a case study by Christoph C. Cemper
2. [icelolly.com: Google Penguin Penalty Recovery](#) – a case study by Derek Devlin
3. [Success: Google Penalty Recovery in 3 Days](#) – a case study by Jens Fröhlich
4. [Google Penalty and Negative SEO Attack WOW Recovery](#) – a case study by Ashley Turner
5. [Google Manual Action Penalties & How to Recover](#) – a blog post by Kristi Hines
6. [Disavowing Unnatural Links Helped Improve This Site's Rankings](#) – a case study by Joe Ryan

### 3. How to build Penguin-friendly links?



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Build the links that will help your rankings, not the ones that attract a Penguin penalty.

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Google has over 200 ways to determine how to rank a page for specific keywords, but it has [confirmed](#) *Links*, *Content*, and *RankBrain* to be the top 3.

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## *Links are the #1 search engine ranking factor alongside great content*

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After you recover from a Google Penalty, not only you, need to keep on monitoring your backlink profile, but you also need to build strong and trustworthy links on a regular basis. Your competitors are building links, Google loves great, relevant links to and from great content and you should not stay behind.

Before the first Google Penguin update in 2012, people just wanted to build as many links as possible, using any available means. In the Penguin era, the focus has shifted to white hat SEO; building trusted and powerful links. Is this easy? Of course, it's not!

Building high-quality links is no easy job nowadays. As Matt Cutts said ([SMX, June 2014](#)) it's possible to do white hat SEO, but this takes "Sweat plus creativity." All of a sudden link building stopped being an easy thing to do, because Google's search algorithm grew more complex, easily detecting any attempts of manipulation.

Avoiding dangerous link building strategies and understanding how you can build links the right way is really important if you want to keep your top position in the search engines.

### **Industrial "Penguin Proof" link building. Really?**

There are hundreds of thousands of agencies that offer link building services. It's cheap, it's fast, you don't have to struggle at all, and they often claim that the links they build overnight are "Penguin proof." It looks like you found the perfect deal. What else could you wish for? It sounds too good to be true and most probably, it is.

Quantity is not quality, and a link building strategy that doesn't add value to anyone is something that Google calls spam:

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*"Any links intended to manipulate [PageRank](#) or a site's ranking in Google search results may be considered part of a link scheme and a violation of Google's [Webmaster Guidelines](#). This includes any behavior that manipulates links to your site or outgoing links from your site."*

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LinkResearchTools

 Tweet

## 3.1 Can a website rank without links?

We say that a website cannot rank without links.

### Why do we think that?

- because links are Google's #1 ranking factor
- because links are the WEB
- because links point to great content (that deserves to rank well)
- because they transfer power
- because they transfer trust
- because it's through links that Google discovers your website...

the list can go on forever...

But don't take it from us when we say that links are important, take it directly from Google.

In March 2016, in a [Q&A with Google](#), Andrey Lipattsev, a Search Quality Senior Strategist at Google, said the first two ranking factors were links and content:

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*"I can tell you what they are. It is content. And it's links pointing to your site."  
(Andrey Lipattsev, Search Quality Senior Strategist at Google)*

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We've seen [Google confirming that links are a very important ranking factor](#) and that ranking without links is nearly impossible on other occasions as well.

## 3.2 Change the way you think about links

The big shift in the mindset here is that the old saying, "a link is a link" is simply no longer true.

Search engines have increasingly put measures in place to evaluate not just the quantity, but also the *quality* of inbound links. This means that an inbound link profile that primarily consists of such "low-quality" links is likely to trigger a red flag.

"*The more, the better*" saying doesn't go for links. At least not as long as "more" means links you buy without checking if they are risky for your backlink profile or not. You'd better aim for fewer high-quality links, then for thousands of links that bring no value to your backlink profile. Weak or risky backlinks won't help your rankings at all. It can go even worse. These links can get you a Google penalty and severe (if not 100%) loss of organic traffic.

Links are not all the same. The point is to understand:

- how many linking pages, subdomains, domains, and root domains?
- how many links per month?
- what kind of links (Follow, NoFollow, Redirects, Javascript, Frames, ..)?
- what link Power and Trust?
- which linking keywords ("money" or "brand")?
- what link risk?

What's more, a link that helps one website could hurt another one.

Here are some examples:

- The website that the link points to already has inbound links from the same network or owner.
- The sites that are linked to are thematically unrelated — in other words, one website is linking to another website that is not on-topic, and thus irrelevant. For example, a “Buy Viagra” link to a tax advisor website is problematic; whereas, it would be considered thematically appropriate if linking to a site where one could purchase Viagra. The same is often true for other verticals, but the “porn-pills-casino” (PPC) links are specifically bad for most sites.
- The link anchor text is too keyword-heavy. While it is acceptable to use occasionally keyword-rich anchor text to link to your site, it begins to look unnatural if the overwhelming majority of your backlinks is like this. A good backlink profile contains a wide variety of links, including homepage links, sub-page links, links with missing anchor text, links with “Click Here!” anchor text, links with keyword-rich anchor text, contextual links, links with the brand name as anchor text, etc. If your backlink profile leans too heavily toward keyword-rich anchor text links, this might trigger a red flag.

From these brief examples, you see that there's one important thing that's changed with the Google Penguin updates:

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*You have to look at your link profile as a whole and review each new link in the context of your existing links.*

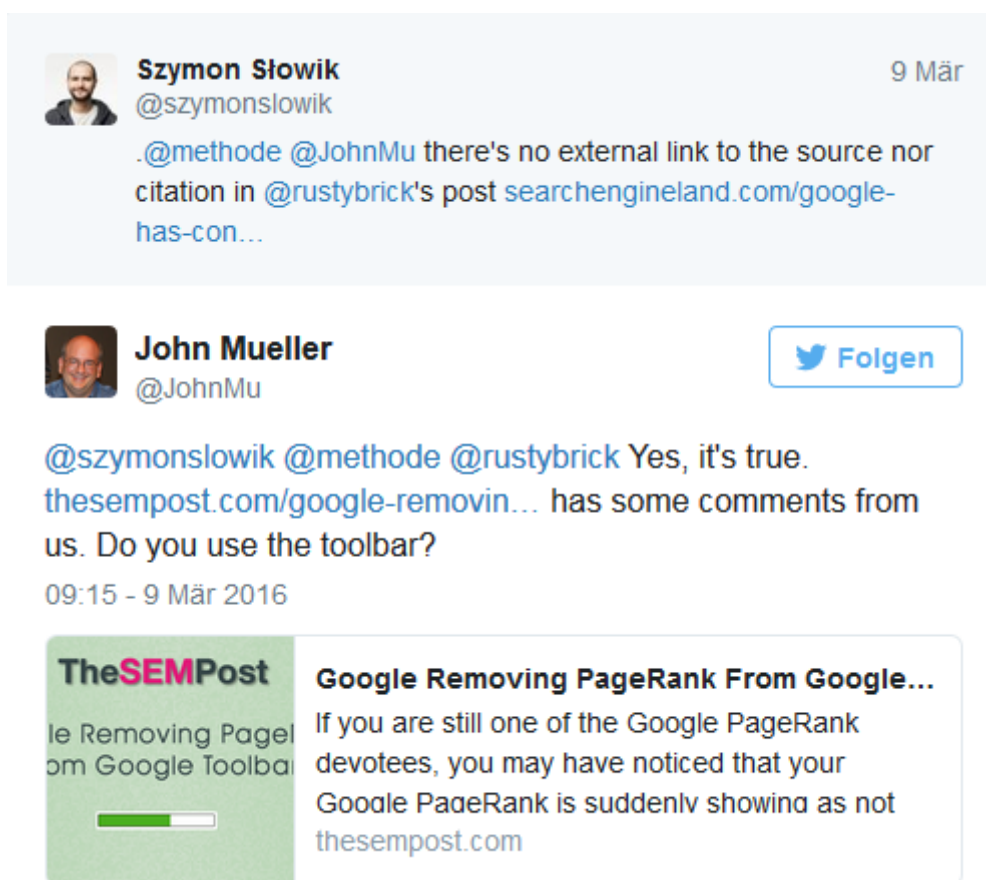
---

### 3.3 Forget about Google's Toolbar PageRank

You sure heard about Google's Toolbar PageRank and used it at some point to assess the quality of a website or a specific page. Although the PageRank algorithm itself is important, Google's Toolbar PageRank is just a useless SEO metric.

The Web changes every day, good links can become bad links and the other way around. You should always make sure you are using the most accurate, up-to-date metrics when evaluating link building opportunities. PageRank was for a long time far from being accurate or up-to-date.

We can now say that PageRank is officially dead, and no serious SEO should consider it anymore. In March 2016, Google has officially confirmed removing the Toolbar PageRank.



The screenshot shows a Twitter thread. At the top, a tweet from Szymon Słowik (@szymonslowik) dated 9 Mär asks @methode and @JohnMu if there's no external link to the source nor citation in @rustybrick's post [searchengineland.com/google-has-con...](http://searchengineland.com/google-has-con...). Below it, a reply from John Mueller (@JohnMu) dated 09:15 - 9 Mär 2016 says "Yes, it's true. [thesempost.com/google-removin...](http://thesempost.com/google-removin...) has some comments from us. Do you use the toolbar?". The reply includes a link to a blog post from TheSEMPost titled "Google Removing PageRank From Google...". The blog post snippet reads: "If you are still one of the Google PageRank devotees, you may have noticed that your Gooble PaaeRank is suddenly showing as not [thesempost.com](http://thesempost.com)".

Now that the Toolbar PageRank is gone, SEOs still need a reliable set of metrics to look at when assessing the trustworthiness and power of a page or domain. LinkResearchTools developed the LRT Power\*Trust metric already in 2012 and, since 2015, offers it also as a powerful browser extension for Chrome and Firefox. You can [download it for free](#).



The [LRT Power\\*Trust browser extension](#) is more than a replacement for Google's toolbar PageRank. A two-dimensional SEO metric that will help you quickly assess the power and trustworthiness of a website or page while you browse the web.

By looking at the LRT Power\*Trust metric, you can quickly answer the most important SEO questions:

- is it ok to build this link on this site?
- is this link worth keeping?
- and which links should go to the disavow file?

### 3.4 Discover great link building opportunities

#### 3.4.1 Discover competitors' common backlinks

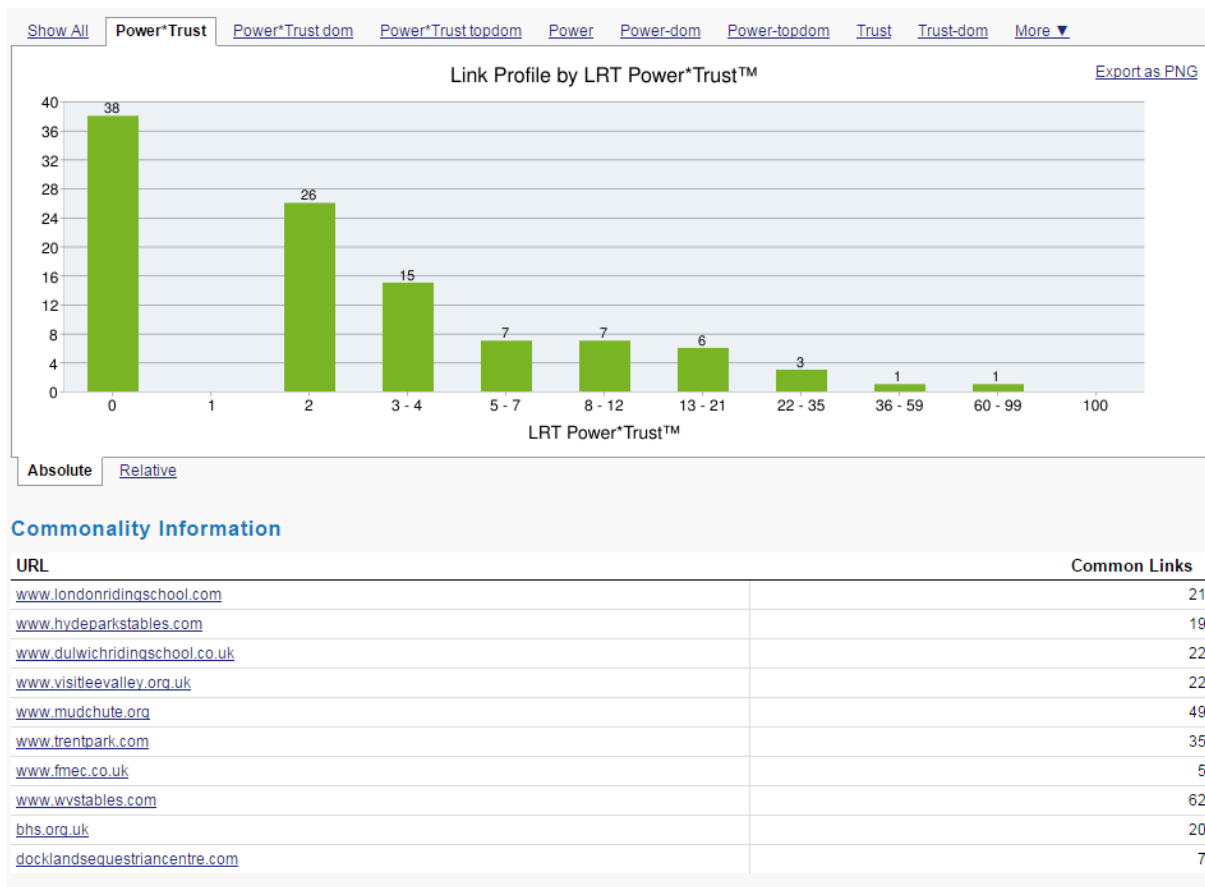
If you research your competitors, you will probably notice that they have some backlinks in common which you do not. Well, if they managed to get these backlinks, why shouldn't you too?

All you have to do is to analyze these backlinks and try to get them as well. The [Common Backlinks Tool \(CBLT\)](#) is a tool specially made for this. Enter up to 10 competitors and start your report. CBLT will help you find common backlinks and also discover your competitor's sources and techniques.

Domain	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	Co#	BL
<a href="#">bhs.org.uk</a>																						8
<a href="#">chronofhorse.com</a>																						2
<a href="#">newrider.com</a>																						7
<a href="#">botw.org.uk</a>																						8
<a href="#">pcuk.org</a>																						6
<a href="#">maqnoliaproperty.co.uk</a>																						2
<a href="#">groupon.co.uk</a>																						4
<a href="#">highlandponventhusiasts.co.uk</a>																						2
<a href="#">countryfile.com</a>																						3
<a href="#">sportsbase.co.uk</a>																						7

The [Missing Links Tool \(MLT\)](#) works in a very similar way to the Common Backlinks Tool, but this time, you can enter your domain and then look for the common links that your competitors already have, but you don't. You can input ten competitors.

It is great to see a nice wide spread of Power\*Trust for the common backlinks, so there must be some great opportunities in there.



To make things super easy, there are two pre-defined Filter Slices, 'Good Links' and 'Bad Links.'

Filter Slices

Create slice

Stored slices (Show unsliced report)

Details [Minimize](#)

[> Setup Outreach](#)

Read [this blog post](#) to see how you can use LinkResearchTools to get interesting link building ideas from your competitors.

### 3.4.2 Find the strongest competitors healthy backlinks

Since Google launched the Penguin update in 2012, strong links are not the only webmaster's concern. If you do not want to become the victim of a Penalty, links must be safe as well. How do you find those strong, and yet not risky links?

Use [Link Detox \(DTOX\)](#) to explore some specific competitors, or [Competitive Link Detox \(CDTOX\)](#) to compare your site against 10 of your competitors. After you get the report results, you can easily sort links by Power\*Trust and by low [DTOXRISK](#).

Showing 1 to 25 of 1,754 links (filtered from 3,945 total links) Export Filtered Data as: CSV | XLSX — "Hide Columns" Mode | Hide Columns

From URL	Anchor Text	Class	DTOXRISK	Rules	Power * Trust	Power * Trust dom
<input type="text" value="type to search..."/>	<input type="text" value="type to search..."/>	Se	Low	Select tr	from to...	from to...
<input type="checkbox"/> <a href="http://www.torinofilmfest.org/sponsor.html">http://www.torinofilmfest.org/sponsor.html</a>	[IMG no alt-text]	n/a	Low	SUSP20 (3)	20	24
<input type="checkbox"/> <a href="http://boitalia.org/sostenitori/lotteria-benefica-2016/">http://boitalia.org/sostenitori/lotteria-benefica-2016/</a>	Caffè Molinari	n/a	Low	SUSP23	12	12
<input type="checkbox"/> <a href="http://www.officinadelgusto.com/">http://www.officinadelgusto.com/</a>	[IMG no alt-text]	n/a	Low	SUSP23	12	9
<input type="checkbox"/> <a href="http://boitalia.org/chi-siamo/finanziatori-e-partner/">http://boitalia.org/chi-siamo/finanziatori-e-partner/</a>	CAFFE' Molinari	n/a	Low	SUSP23	12	12
<input type="checkbox"/> <a href="http://www.palombinishop.com/">http://www.palombinishop.com/</a>	[IMG] Caffè.it	B	Low	SUSP9	12	9
<input type="checkbox"/> <a href="http://adriatvinimport.dk/ovrige-produkter/espressok...">http://adriatvinimport.dk/ovrige-produkter/espressok...</a>	>> Besag Casa del Caffè's website	n/a	Low	SUSP22 (2)	12	6
<input type="checkbox"/> <a href="http://www.couscousfest.it/sponsor/">http://www.couscousfest.it/sponsor/</a>	[IMG no alt-text]	n/a	Low	SUSP9	12	15
<input type="checkbox"/> <a href="http://www.istitutoimballaggio.it/i-nostri-soci/utill...">http://www.istitutoimballaggio.it/i-nostri-soci/utill...</a>	[IMG] CAFFE VERGNANO	n/a	Low	SUSP6 (2)	12	12
<input type="checkbox"/> <a href="http://praxeology.net/molinarisoc.htm">http://praxeology.net/molinarisoc.htm</a>	[IMG no alt-text]	n/a	Low	SUSP23	9	12
<input type="checkbox"/> <a href="http://www.confindustriamodena.it/it/giunta_1.html">http://www.confindustriamodena.it/it/giunta_1.html</a>	Caffè Molinari spa	n/a	Low	SUSP23	9	12
<input type="checkbox"/> <a href="http://www.consorzioilbiologico.it/category/associati/">http://www.consorzioilbiologico.it/category/associati/</a>	www.caffemolinari.com	B	Low	SUSP22	9	9
<input type="checkbox"/> <a href="http://www.ronchiverdi.it/">http://www.ronchiverdi.it/</a>	[IMG no alt-text]	n/a	Low	SUSP22	9	6
<input type="checkbox"/> <a href="http://www.dueruote.it/eicma2016/">http://www.dueruote.it/eicma2016/</a>	[IMG no alt-text]	n/a	Low	SUSP23	9	25
<input type="checkbox"/> <a href="http://www.dueruote.it/notizie/eicma2016/chi-sara-la...">http://www.dueruote.it/notizie/eicma2016/chi-sara-la...</a>	[IMG no alt-text]	n/a	Low	SUSP23	9	25
<input type="checkbox"/> <a href="http://www.dueruote.it/notizie/eicma2016/eicma-2016-...">http://www.dueruote.it/notizie/eicma2016/eicma-2016-...</a>	[IMG no alt-text]	n/a	Low	SUSP23	9	25
<input type="checkbox"/> <a href="http://www.iluss.it/ita/cultura-it.html">http://www.iluss.it/ita/cultura-it.html</a>	Il caffè	n/a	Low	SUSP9	9	12

### 3.4.3 Find the most relevant link building opportunities

There are many opportunities for link building on the Internet. There are many forums, blogs or sites where you could place your backlink, but usually, it is not so easy to find them. Whether you want to find a strong, relevant site or blog where you can place a guest article or thematic forum with Follow links – the [SERP Research Tool \(SERP\)](#) will help you. SERP is designed to help you find the most relevant and strongest results.

After you get your results, you can sort them by strength, theme or any other metric you want. The best thing about SERP is that you know these links are relevant and high authorities in your industry.

Very often, in everyday life, a quick reaction can mean the difference between success and failure. On the Internet, it is pretty similar. It is extremely important to be aware of your competitor's activities.

[Link Alerts \(LA\)](#) is a tool built to inform you about your new backlinks, but, apart from that, you can also use it to monitor your competitors. Not only will it help you find some new backlink opportunities, but also discover some new sources and techniques you could use in the future.

The best thing about Link Alerts is an e-mail notification you get with fresh backlinks. This will allow you to identify negative SEO attacks right away. In the case of new, unwanted links, you can disavow them immediately, and thus protect your site from being hit by a Google Penalty. Read all about the [risks and techniques of negative SEO attacks here](#) and learn how you can protect your site.

### 3.4.4 Have your competitors indirectly link to you

The common outbound links method implemented in the Link Juice Thief (LJT) is a very special trick for attaining good neighborhood. Even more than that. It can put you in a highly relevant hotspot of the link graph and make your competitors link to you indirectly.

How? By trying to get links on pages where, multiple competitors link to.

Your competitors will never link to you directly – but getting a link on a second level is possible and highly recommended. Some of the competitors you have are also authorities. Wikipedia, news portals and similar high-value sites that might not want to link to you directly also. Using the common outbound link method helps you get their trust also.

Showing 1 to 25 of 117 domains Export Filtered Data as: [CSV](#) | [XLSX](#) — "Hide Columns" Mode | [Hide](#)

Domain	1	2	3	4	5	6	Co#	BLdom	DomPop	Power-dom	Trust-dom	Power * Trust dom
<a href="#">cnn.com</a>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		1	179,509,113	669,066	9	81
<a href="#">washingtonpost.com</a>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		2	72,387,929	450,927	9	81
<a href="#">ebay.com</a>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		1	2,389,957,445	608,539	9	81
<a href="#">nytimes.com</a>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		2	170,448,114	858,196	9	81
<a href="#">tinyurl.com</a>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		1	49,139,227,867	761,833	10	80
<a href="#">go.com</a>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		1	90,741,848	503,283	8	72
<a href="#">ibm.com</a>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		1	36,657,600	263,524	8	72
<a href="#">aol.com</a>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		2	172,337,659	357,512	8	72
<a href="#">nih.gov</a>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		2	326,908,620	560,058	8	72
<a href="#">cdc.gov</a>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		1	31,646,741	322,347	8	72
<a href="#">telegraph.co.uk</a>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		1	39,520,431	425,736	8	64
<a href="#">foxnews.com</a>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		2	49,009,915	259,214	8	64
<a href="#">marriott.com</a>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		1	11,413,126	155,567	7	63
<a href="#">who.int</a>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		1	23,751,913	248,726	7	63
<a href="#">fda.gov</a>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		2	14,728,521	177,701	7	63
<a href="#">nasa.gov</a>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		1	50,465,719	328,838	7	63
<a href="#">ed.gov</a>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		1	52,076,077	154,061	7	63
<a href="#">noaa.gov</a>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		3	63,277,154	209,621	7	63
<a href="#">economist.com</a>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		1	13,351,295	184,759	7	56
<a href="#">mtv.com</a>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		2	9,529,809	126,745	7	56
<a href="#">nfl.com</a>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		3	34,859,998	80,962	7	56

### 3.5 Check new links for risk

If you get new link building opportunities from various webmasters, you have to consider how these links will affect your backlink profile, if they are natural and considered to be low-risk links in your niche.

The solution to the problem of overlapping link building efforts is to review all link opportunities carefully before you build the link.

Every webmaster should, therefore, do the following:

1. Review all existing backlinks for risky and potentially harmful links, marking everything you want to disavow or remove.
2. Examine your link builders' list(s) of potential link building opportunities.
3. Check if the links your link builders have identified are coming from the same IP-network, same domain owners or same Class-C blocks as any of your existing backlinks. This requires gathering domain information for every potential link from their respective data sources.
4. Create an overall SEO risk assessment for the potential links your link builders presented.
5. You will see how your site's risk would change in case you got this link. Based on that, you can decide whether the link is worth getting or not.

Gathering all those metrics for potential links and checking them against your existing links can be a tedious task indeed, but in a post-Penguin world, it is mandatory. Link Detox makes that process easier with a mode called [Link Opportunity Audit \(What-if\)](#).

When you start such a simulation, make sure you ignore the links that you are planning to disavow. In LinkResearchTools, this is done automatically, but if you choose to review new links manually, this is something you need to keep in mind. Google will not count your disavowed links – and neither should you.

Keeping track of previously disavowed links is another story and a crucial detail in Link Risk Management. Google accepts only one disavow file. If you want to add new links to your disavow list, make sure you don't overwrite previous links. Link Detox maintains your disavow file with all the links automatically, simplifying the repeated process of diagnosis, upload, and re-diagnosis.

Using Link Detox in the Link Opportunity Audit (What-if) mode is the best way to analyze a large list of link potentials, but what if you only have a few or just a single URL?

You don't need to wait for a Link Detox report to finish to check a handful of links. With the new [Link Opportunities Review Tool \(LORT\)](#), you can check links quickly and easily. Now you can see

how worthwhile the link will be to your link profile before you get the link. **And it's FAST.** A lot faster than running a full Link Detox in Link Opportunity Audit mode.

Faced with Penguin, a reliable Link Risk Management process has become a highly important and indispensable task in SEO. If you want to protect your site from Penguin, you need to be proactive and start your process today.

### 3.6 Make sure that you don't build links in "a bad neighborhood."

People frequently use the term "bad neighborhood" in the SEO industry. It occurs when you don't pay attention to good co-citations. If you are in a bad neighborhood, your site is probably linked on a page that also links to the "bad guys" on the web. This doesn't have to be malware or virus sites necessarily.

The "bad guys" that put you in a bad neighborhood are sites that suffer from at least one of the following problems:

- Low-quality content – e.g. duplicate content stolen from other sites
- Low-quality site – a site that Google does not rank well for some reason, e.g. banned domains and very new sites
- Off-topic content – a page that does not relate to the content of the page where it is linked and the topic of your site.
- Are you still wondering what a bad neighborhood is? The picture below is a classic example of it:

#### **Paid Advertisers**

[Sunglasses](#)  
[Online Casinos](#)  
[Cheap Viagra](#)  
[Gambling Online](#)

[Casino Betting](#)  
[Cheap Drugs Online](#)  
[Online Gambling](#)  
[Prescription Drugs](#)

It shows some links in a paid link ad box, which is already bad by itself. As you can see, there is a sunglasses link amongst many other casino and pharmacy links. Even if the site owner tells you it would be a good choice to get a link there: it is not!

You should pay attention to the neighborhood of every single link you have to your website. Even if you have in-house link builders or a company taking care of link building for you, they

must be aware of this matter. Link builders should pay attention to what matters: the neighborhood in which you place your links!

Not paying attention to your neighborhood can have severe effects: you may be deemed to be one of the “bad guys” by Google and thereby lose rankings and trust by Google.

### 3.7 Watch out for NoFollow links

NoFollow links are not risk-free, but they are natural. If you get a NoFollow link on topic, from and to great content, cheer up! Having NoFollow links in your link profile was always natural, and it still is. The value of NoFollow links has often led to heated debates among online marketers and SEOs. Ever since Google Penguin has been rolled out for the first time in 2012, the risk of links has become a central question.

People sometimes claim that links marked as NoFollows have no impact. Some SEOs still rely on former Google statements suggesting that NoFollows do not pass PageRank, taking this as “evidence” that spammy NoFollow links cannot put you at risk of a Penalty.

Switching past paid links, spam links in article directories and press releases to NoFollow however not always removes their risk. Google’s algorithms focus on detecting spam intent. We have seen examples where problematic and unnatural links were set to NoFollow and still objected by Google.

Read more about NoFollow links in [this research: NoFollow Links – Risky or Irrelevant?](#) including the results of an interesting survey, where we asked different SEOs about the risk of NoFollow links.

### 3.8 Improve the backlinks you already have

Getting links is never an easy task when you have to approach someone out of the blue and persuade them to link to your site. But what if they are already linking to you? Reaching out to someone who is already linking to you is so much easier than cold calling.

So how can you improve the links you already have?

Here are 13 different ways how you can improve the backlinks you already have:

1. Change Mentions into Backlinks
2. Optimize the Anchor Text
3. Change NoFollow links into DoFollow links



4. Add the “alt” attribute to image links
5. Find dropped links and try to recover them
6. Find links that go to non-existent pages and recover the juice
7. Undisavow links that don’t belong in your disavow file anymore
8. Unpick Redirect Chains
9. Build links to your link sources
10. Improve the content on the link source to improve relevancy to your site
11. Replace direct links with social profiles where appropriate
12. Link to the more relevant inner page on your site rather than the homepage
13. Make existing linkers link to you again.

You find each of the above methods described in detail in this interesting article written by our LRT Certified Xpert, Rick Lomas. Read more [about the 13 different ways in which you can improve your backlinks.](#)!

## 3.9 Avoid bad link building strategies –choose smart alternatives

### 3.9.1 Buying or selling links

Google clearly states that buying backlinks to improve your rankings is against their webmaster quality guidelines. They see links as votes, and it’s not ethical to pay for votes. Links bought from sites that openly state that they sell links are your ticket to a Google Penalty!

Smart solution

Instead of buying links, you can invest in creating high-quality content that will attract natural backlinks. Taking this approach doesn’t cost you more than buying a bunch of bad links, and you can ultimately achieve much better results, it just requires more patience, “sweat plus creativity.”

The secret to success is placing a link inside high-quality content and making sure it leads to high-quality content.



Here's what [Google](#) says about links and content:

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*“The best way to get other sites to create high-quality, relevant links to yours is to create unique, relevant content that can naturally gain popularity in the Internet community. Creating good content pays off: Links are usually editorial votes given by choice, and the more useful content you have, the greater the chances someone else will find that content valuable to their readers and link to it.”*

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If you want a risk-free approach to SEO, then don't buy links. If you ever bought some, get rid of them now!

### 3.9.2 Excessive link exchanges

Exchanging links with people you know just for the sake of cross-linking will negatively impact your website's ranking in search results.

Here is an example of how reciprocal linking can go wrong: You have a website about legal services, and you link to a bakery and have that bakery website link to you, then you may have just created a worthless link. Imagine that you continue by linking to coffee shops, clothing stores, computer repair businesses, garden equipment and so on and they all link back to you. This reciprocal link exchange may cause Google to penalize your website.

Smart solution

As long as you don't do reciprocal linking excessively, these links make sense and are relevant to the users of both websites. There is nothing to worry about.

If the website of a Court Office links to a legal website and the legal website has a link to the Court Office, this link is not harmful. It may not have great value for boosting a website's ranking, but it surely provides value to the users of both websites.

### 3.9.3 Massive guest posting campaigns with keyword-rich anchor text links

It's great that people write about you and link back to your website, but just as long as they create links in a natural way. Stuffing the anchor text with money keywords is far from natural and will surely get you in trouble.

Smart solution

Using brand keywords or navigational phrases is a good option in this case. Obsessing about money anchor text is wrong. It's important to have anchor texts that are relevant to your

website but keep in mind that using money keywords as anchor text for all your inbound links is a bad practice, and it may put you on Google's blacklist.

### 3.9.4 Adding links to any link directory

Adding your site to any web directory just to get a backlink will have a negative effect on your website's ranking. Most web directories out there provide no real value to the Internet users and Google has excluded them from its search results. You don't want your website to be in there!

Smart solution

Search for trusted directories. There are a few for every niche. These directories provide useful information to you, your target audience and your potential customers.

The new PageRank is relevancy, therefore building links in niche directories and directories belonging to informative websites relevant for your industry are beneficial for you.

### 3.9.5 Optimized links placed in unhelpful forum or blog comments

Participating in forum discussions and adding random comments to any blog out there, overusing money keywords in your anchor texts is completely wrong and spammy.

Smart solution

Participate in an active discussion on a forum or blog that is relevant to your business and make sure that your comment provides contextual value to the discussion. Now you don't have to worry about sharing a relevant link.

### 3.9.6 Web directory listings

Adding your site to any web directory just to get a backlink will have a negative effect on your website's ranking. Most directories provide no real value to the Internet users and Google has excluded them from its search results. Again, you don't want your website to be in there.

Smart solution

There are some good directories that also provide useful information for you and your potential customers and are closely related to your industry.

For example, a business web directory that specializes in legal services and lists lawyers all over the world. With listings organized by practice area and location, this would be a place that would help a user find the best lawyer for their case.

At the same time, the directory can contain a knowledge database with the most recent legal updates in the world. This web directory is both valuable for people that need a lawyer and for lawyers themselves.

### 3.10 Monitor all your link building campaigns

[Julie Joyce wrote about](#) the issues that occur when clients hire multiple link building companies, and I can confirm that splitting link building responsibilities among various SEOs the name of diversification bears a risky side effect when these SEOs create bad links unknowingly.

Let's take the following example:

A client X hires three link builders — we'll call them Tony, Fred, and Susan — to build X links per month, s/he's already in deep trouble if s/he doesn't review their plans before they build those links.

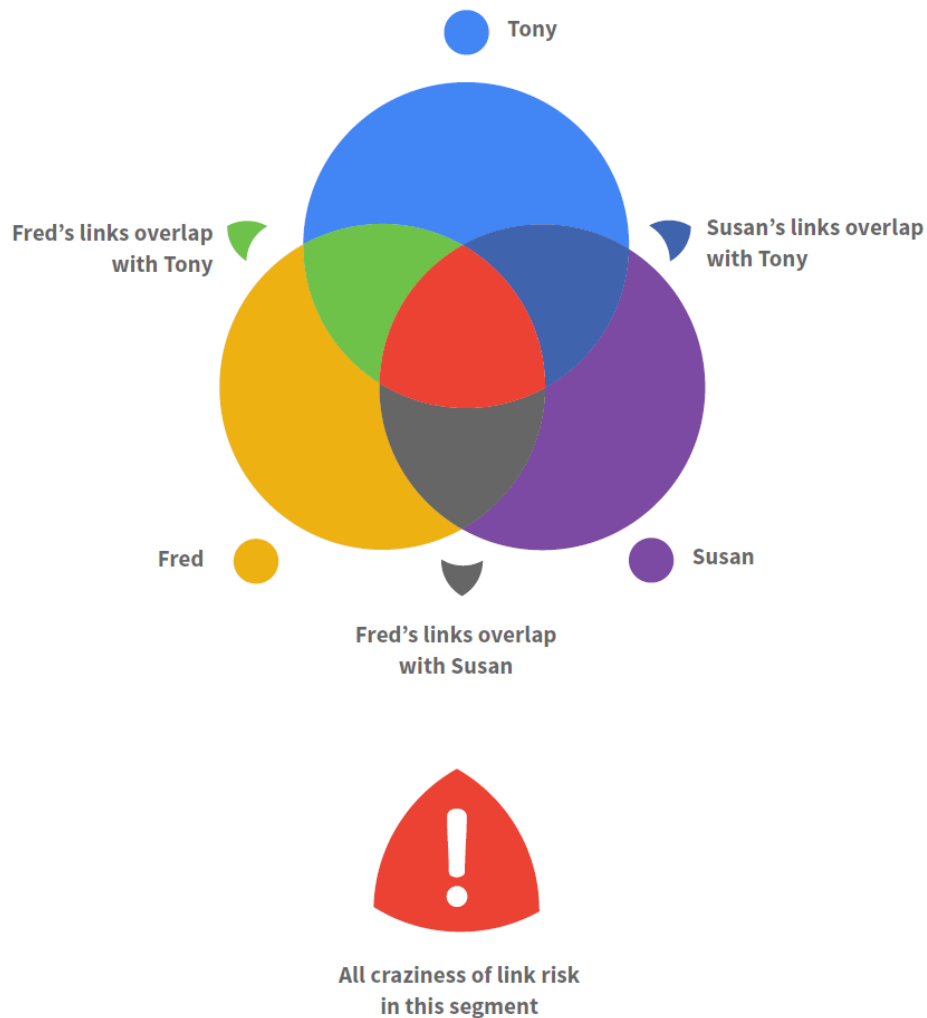
Chances are very high that each of our three link builders will try to secure link spots on websites that are somehow related (especially in the case of paid links).

However, links are usually not unique but sold from the same networks and same owners to many agencies at a time.

Thus, a typical link building process could look like this:

1. Client X tells Tony, Fred, and Susan: "Get me 20 great links!"
2. Tony, Fred, and Susan reach out to their network for quick/paid links that are thematically related to Client X's website. Of course, those are often unnatural links because they are paid or swapped, but let's assume for a moment they were camouflaged in such a great manner that Google would not detect they were unnatural (rare, but possible).

3. These webmasters separately respond to Tony, Fred, and Susan to present them with potential link opportunities. Tony, Fred, and Susan all pursue the strongest links available and manage to get client X-linked there. The result is something like this:



As you can clearly see, these three link builders would inadvertently work to create a very unnatural backlink profile, due to a lack of communication. Without even noticing, this could get their client in real trouble. And, we haven't even taken into account the thousands of links that client X could already have! Can you imagine what further conflicts there might be? So the moral of the story is you risk your rankings if you go without a clear link building strategy.

Real link building is no easy job. Creating great links takes a lot of time and requires effort, but building links that create value for both your users and the Web is what great link building is all about.

### 3.11 Further online resources on link building

1. [7 Golden Rules of Link Building](#) – eBook by Christoph C. Cemper
2. [How to do Link Building with Impactana and LinkResearchTools](#) – case study by Benjamin Mylius
3. [20 SEO Link Building Tips](#) – blog post by Christoph C. Cemper
4. [Guest Posting the Right Way for Link Building](#) - case study by Demmy Oshodi
5. [Co-citations: Who Are Your Neighbors in the Link Building World](#) – blog post by Christoph C. Cemper
6. [Why Link Building \(the Right Way\) is Still Important](#) – blog post by Kristi Hines
7. [How to Find the Best Link Building Opportunities](#) – blog post by Rick Lomas
8. [Link Building Tips for Small Businesses](#) – case study by Wojtek Mazur
9. [10 outreach Tips For Building Quality Backlinks to Your Website](#) – case study by Ashley Turner
10. [13 Ways to Improve the Backlinks You Already Have](#) – blog post by Rick Lomas
11. [Why You Need Links Similar to Your Competition](#) – case study by Rick Lomas
12. [NoFollow links – Risky or Irrelevant?](#) – blog post by Christoph C. Cemper
13. [6 Reasons Why You Should Check Your Disavow File Again](#) – blog post by Christoph C. Cemper
14. [How to use ScrapeBox for link audits, link building, and on-page SEO](#) – case study by Bartosz Goralewicz

## 4. Real Time Google Penguin Q&A



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Ever since Google announced making Google Penguin 4.0 part of their Core Algorithm, SEOs all around the world ask themselves a lot of questions.

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## 4.1 Penguin 4.0 – Important Changes

### **Q: What exactly is Google Penguin 4.0 and how does it affect my current SEO?**

The Penguin update isn't something new. It happened in 2012, 2013, 2014 and now 2016 we have Penguin 4.0. The goal of this update is to combat web spam and keyword stuffing used by some websites to manipulate the search results.

How it affects your SEO-strategy heavily depends on what your SEO-strategy is.

The fact that Google Penguin is now more granular means that your website could get into a partial penalty, while before that was not possible. Parts of your website, like folders or pages, even one single page could drop in rankings, while the rankings of your other pages remain stable.

You need to pay special attention to subfolders and subpages on your website. We expect to see a lot of negative SEO attacks directed to single directories now. Penguin 4.0 makes link risk management - the practice of proactive link audits and disavows - more important than ever. Doing a thorough competitor analysis for every main topic a site covers is also very important if you want to understand different risk level standards in your niche. [Competitive Link Detox \(CDTOX\)](#) can help you understand the risk levels in your industry and find strong links that your competitors have.

### **Q: What are the most important parts about the Google Penguin 4.0 update?**

The two biggest changes are: the update is real-time, and Google Penguin is now more granular. Real-time means, that changes in your backlink profile will affect search engine results as your links are re-crawled. Granularity means that now single directories, pages, and keywords could be penalized or go up in rankings instead of the whole domain.

### **Q: Did Google confirm this update?**

Yes, Google confirmed in an [official statement](#) published on the Google Webmaster Central Blog (September 23, 2016) that they rolled out the Penguin 4.0 update as part of their Core Algorithm.

### **Q: When do you expect Google Penguin to roll out completely?**

The roll out will never be „complete“. As Google crawls the web ongoing and it will change on an ongoing basis. The question probably refers to “when will I see all the effects for my website”

and that happens when all your links and all their links and all their links, etc. were crawled across the web, so I would give this a couple of weeks until than we will still see fluctuations.

**Q: Penguin is not on my radar. Never has been on my radar. Why should I care?**

When you work in SEO and depend on organic traffic, you need to have the mindset, which you want to understand how a search engine works. That's why you do things that help you improve your organic traffic. Google Penguin was always an on-top-filter built to fight web spam. Now it's part of Google's Core Algorithm, and it works in real time. If your backlink profile has a high [DToXRISK](#), your website, a page or a directory on your website will drop in rankings.

**Q: Is Penguin more aggressive/sensitive now that it's included in the algorithm?**

We think that Penguin is more sensitive. It can now filter and penalize single pages and folders. Webmasters will not be able to see huge ranking drops like it happened with the previous Penguin updates.

#### 4.1.1 The Real-Time-Feature

**Q: What does "Real-Time" mean in relation to Google's Penguin update?**

Real-time means, that changes in your backlink profile and Disavows will affect search engine results as your links are re-crawled. Read more about [how the Real Time Penguin works](#).

**Q: Google says that the new update will not have any impact until sites get recrawled. Do they mean your site or all the sites that link to yours?**

Google needs to crawl all the sites linking to yours. Yes, Google refers to crawling the websites linking to yours. The more backlinks you have in your disavow file, the longer it takes until all your links get re-crawled. This also means that if you have many spammy links on some old forums, those links do not get crawled very often. We built [Link Detox Boost](#) in 2013, to speed up the crawling and solve this issue.

#### 4.1.2 The Granularity of the Real-Time Google Penguin

**Q: What does it mean when Google Penguin now works "more granular"?**

Granularity means that now single directories, pages, and keywords could be penalized or go up in rankings instead of the whole domain.

**Q: Will Penguin 4.0 affect the entire website or only the page that has spam links?**



Penguin is now more granular. This means that a single page or a folder can trigger a penalty. You could also get a penalty on two subfolders or your whole subdomain. Everything is possible.

This is not only about URLs, but also about keywords. Your top money-keyword that brings you the most traffic could also drop. This is also what we understand by granularity. Read more about this on our [Blog](#).

## 4.2 Real-Time Google Penguin Further Changes

**Q: What's your opinion about Gary's statement, that now the bad links no longer hurt you, but will simply be ignored?**

Some links may be ignored, but Gary also said, that we should continue using the Disavow tool.

**Q: Does the Penguin 4.0 only affect Money-Keyword-Links or are Brand Keywords also important?**

That depends on the standards in your niche. Money-Keywords are not automatically bad, but you need to consider the money-keyword ratio of your competitors, too.

**Q: How important is Artificial Intelligence in the new Penguin update?**

Google uses Artificial Intelligence (AI) or machine learning in their RankBrain algorithm. RankBrain calculates different rules for each country, market, keyword, etc. for their search results AI was always important.

**Q: If a link is disavowed by many webmasters but not by me, does Penguin start to ignore that link eventually?**

The data quality of most disavow files is really poor in many industries. Google can't use disavow files alone because they are not covering the whole world. Many webmasters don't use disavow at all. Of course, it is helpful to find patterns and train the Artificial Intelligence, but using it that way would be just too simple.

**Q: Does the fact that Penguin 4.0 is now part of Google's Core Algorithm mean we have to focus more on On-Page-SEO?**

On-Page and Off-Page SEO always went hand in hand. Content and links go together. Google said that they want webmasters to focus more on amazing and unique content. While this is

true, John Mueller also confirmed that [Links are really important](#) to Google. You should care about On-Page just as much as you need to care about Off-Page.

**Q: What about links from foreign websites? Do we already know if these links will be more important with Penguin 4.0?**

Not really. You can check how many backlinks from foreign websites your competitors have with the [Competitive Landscape Analyzer \(CLA\)](#) to be on the safe side. Also, make sure that these links are from countries connected to your business. Otherwise, you may be dealing with a Negative SEO attack.

**Q: What about the Accelerated Mobile Pages (AMP) effect? Isn't it only available for sites with news and partner dash?**

No, this has changed with the new update.

**Q: In the future: what would you say could change with a Google "Penguin 5" update?**

There will be no further Penguin Update. Google announced that this update is now part of the Core Algorithm. They will still change things in the future, but won't announce it any longer.

## 4.3 How to Deal with Traffic Changes

**Q: How do you determine if you've been hit by Penguin or Panda?**

Now with the Panda and Penguin signals being in the Core Algorithm, it's very difficult to spot the exact issue that caused the rankings drop.

For detecting a Penguin penalty, you can run a [Link Detox](#) report for the specific page or subfolder that dropped. If the [DTOXRISK](#) is high, then you need to disavow the bad links and use [Link Detox Boost](#) to make Google re-crawl everything faster.

**Q: Do you have any interesting examples of drops or recoveries like in the previous updates?**

Right now you can't give examples because there are not such definite winners or losers like in the last updates. That's exactly what Google wanted to achieve: That the changes happen as softly as possible.

**Q: When will the recoveries start?**

This update is not an update as it was in the past where from one day to another thousand of rankings changed. Penguin is now part of Google's Core algorithm. That means that Google now processes links and redirects and Rel-Canonicals and content differently than they did before the official rollout.

We can already see recoveries, but also drops. Every day and every hour you can see tweets or feedback from users and experts, confirming that rankings are changing.

**Tim Grice** @Tim\_Grice Following

Finally seeing some real gains after penguin.  
Also some nasty drops for certain websites.  
[#penguin4](#)

RETWEETS 8 LIKES 9

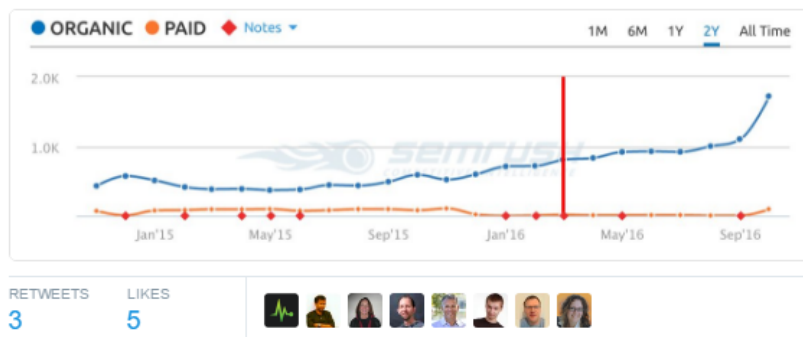
4:15 AM - 5 Oct 2016

**Anthony James** @ThisIsAJames Follow

Post -penguin improvements continuing in the UK this morning.

\*Breathes huge sigh of relief\*

[@Marie\\_Haynes](#) [@glenngabe](#)  
[#Penguin4](#) [#SEO](#)



**Q: Is there a feedback from the SEO market already? A poll?**

According to [a poll from Search Engine Roundtable](#), only 12% said they saw ranking improvements after Google Penguin 4.0 and 15% saw a reduced ranking. 73% did not witness any changes.

**Q: Can you talk about the Google local shakeup that was at the beginning of September?**

We did not look into that too much because it was all related to the existing changes in the rollout of Google Penguin. The local shakeup was probably the beginning of Penguin.

**Q: I recently saw someone complaining about negative SEO against his website. After disavowing and six months later, the website went up with the exact anchor texts that were targeted by the negative SEO attack. What's your thought about that?**

The more aggressive negative SEO would target the keywords you want to rank for and make it look like you wanted to (over)push rankings yourself and then make you drop for it.

The fact that you went up after disavowing the spammy links is because you probably had some other links and the page was targeting those keywords.

**Q: I have a client who got a huge algorithmic Penguin penalty last week. I did quite a heavy Disavow yesterday, and he is complaining that there is no recovery today. What should I tell him?**

The new Penguin 4.0 Update is now Real-Time. This means that changes in your rankings will start as soon as your backlinks are re-crawled by Google. If you have a lot of low-quality links in some old forums, it will take a lot of time for Google to re-crawl those links. Also, it takes Google about 48 hours to send your Disavow File to all of their crawlers. This is why we recommend using the Link Detox Boost 48 hours after uploading your Disavow File.

## 4.4 How can Link Detox help

### **Q: How can Link Detox help with Penguin 4.0?**

Our business is link analysis and understanding which parts of your backlink profile are good or bad. Link Detox is superior to any other SEO tool out there because it combines 24 link data sources.

We show you the full picture of your backlink profile by pulling data from 24 different link sources including MajesticSEO, Ahrefs, SEMrush, Moz, Google Analytics, Google Search Console, Facebook, Twitter and more. We then analyze this data for you and estimate the risk of your website getting a Google Penguin penalty.

Since Penguin 4.0 is now more granular, single pages or subfolder can now get penalties. For detecting a Penguin penalty, you can run a [Link Detox](#) report for the specific page or subfolder that dropped. If the DTOXRISK is high, then you need to disavow the bad links and use Link Detox Boost to make Google re-crawl everything faster.

### **Q: What is the advantage of Link Detox when compared to Google Search Console?**

Link Detox helps you see all the links. We connect to Google Search Console and get some links out of there, but have 24 other link data sources we also get links from. We then combine all the links to analyze the backlink profile. Google does not give you all the links in Google Search Console, especially when links are on penalized pages or domains, they are not listed. Our goal is to give you the most comprehensive backlink profile to analyze the total risk.

**Q: About Competitive Link Detox: What if my competitors have a high DTOXRISK, but have already disavowed the biggest part of their links?** The higher the risk that we calculate for your competitors, the higher the chance, that they disavowed already. Nowadays you have to consider, that everyone on the first result page is disavowing a lot. We asked that question ourselves for our machine learning, but don't want to give out too much information at this point.

### **Q: Should I wait 48 hours before I use Link Detox Boost?**

Yes, because as far as we know, 48 hours is how long it takes for the disavow file to be sent to all the crawlers Google has.

### **Q: If I disavow a whole domain, will Link Detox Boost only boost the homepage?**

Yes, when you disavow a domain we will only boost the starting page because we expect Google to take the whole domain out of the index afterward. If that should change with the new Penguin, we are going to revise this tool.

## **4.5 General SEO-Questions**

### **Q: What SEO metrics should you consider for evaluating unnatural links?**

Apart from looking at the [LRT Power\\*Trust](#), you will also need to look at the [DToXRISK](#) on a link and directory basis.

### **Q: Are links still important to Google?**

“Links, in particular, are really important to Google because that’s how we discover the rest of your website.” - [John Müller](#)

The web is content and links. That’s what Google always said. Links are the web. The web consists of hypertexts, hypermedia, and hyperlinks.

### **Q: Do internal links have any value?**

Yes. Internal linking is important and has value. This is why we do have keywords inside our page linking to other pages. You can manipulate the link graph and push rankings by optimizing these internal links as well. But don’t overdo it and have all internal links pointing towards one page.

### **Q: Is Google still looking into Follow and NoFollow links for ranking?**

Yes! Every link you get from Wikipedia, for example, is a NoFollow but will help you big time. This means that NoFollow links can not only help rankings but also hurt rankings. Just because a link is NoFollow does not mean it does not count at all. The link passes trust and traffic, so why should it not count? Read [more about NoFollow links](#) on our blog.

### **Q: Can too many NoFollow links hurt you?**

That depends on the Follow / NoFollow ratio in your market. With the [Competitive Landscape Analyzer \(CLA\)](#), you can see what ratio is natural for your market.

**Q: If you are in a niche where there are a lot of affiliates, it's very natural that you have more NoFollow links than in other niches. Why is that?**

Affiliates tend to be more aggressive in doing online promotion. That's why you need to do competitive research. There is no one-size-fits-all, but a natural ratio for your niche.

**Q: Is there a minimum amount of backlinks pointing to your URL or folder after which Google starts to consider them toxic or not?**

No. The number of links is meaningless. Both a website with millions of backlinks and a website with hundreds of links can trigger a Google Penguin filter.

What's important is that you always compare your backlink profile to your competitor's backlink profiles. Every niche is different, and your backlink profile doesn't need to stand out too much. Learn more about [competitive analysis](#) and why it's important for your SEO work.

**Q: Do I need to worry if I get backlinks from websites having high PageRank?**

You don't need to worry about PageRank at all. Since Google officially buried the toolbar in April 2016, no SEO should consider PageRank as a metric any longer. Whenever you get a new backlink, you should check the link's [DToXRISK](#). You can receive notifications for new backlinks to your Domain using the [Link Alerts \(LA\)](#).

You should also check your backlinks for good [Power\\*Trust](#). Links with a Power\*Trust near zero are usually not worth keeping. Also, links with very high Power and low Trust could also harm your website.

**Q: Are links in catalogs generally bad?**

Yes, you should treat them with caution.

**Q: Does participating in link or traffic exchange programs affect SEO?**

Yes, it does affect SEO in a bad way. If you are doing this now and already dropped in traffic, you probably have a problem. We suggest running a Link Detox report as soon as possible and disavowing links from this link exchange program, especially if they have a high DToXRISK.

## 4.6 Link building after Penguin 4.0

### **Q: Which link building habits that worked until now will be penalized with this update?**

According to Google, link directories are a thing of the past. They probably improved on the footprinting of link directories and now do not give out penalties, but completely ignore them. That means you are no longer able to use that type of links for any Negative SEO or SEO in general because these links would be ignored immediately. Read more about [how you can build Penguin-friendly links](#).

### **Q: Which personal advice can you give now for building links?**

You should proceed building links and take it seriously. Make sure that the links you build have a good LRT Power\*Trust and a Low DTOXRISK.

You can use the [Link Opportunities Review Tool \(LORT\)](#) to quickly review and evaluate potential links before building them. Based on the proven technology of Link Detox, LORT is very easy to use.

Your benefit: you can quickly decide which links are good for your website and avoid building risky links.

### **Q: Which new SEO strategies do you already see for Google Penguin 4.0?**

1. Blur link quality: this means, for example, you could add a few good links to a directory with lots of bad links to make the overall backlink profile look better.
2. The PPP “Partial Penguin Penalty”: thanks to the granularity you can now take more risks and look for regularities step by step.
3. Easier negative SEO: because of the faster responses of Penguin to links and on page content, pages full of keywords can lead to penalties more quickly. We recommend the use of Link Alerts.
4. Reputation management gets harder: until now you could place cheap links on a highly authoritative domain to push your rankings. If Google now looks at those links separately and devalues them, the old reputation management techniques won't work any longer.



**Q: How much stock would you place in the fact, that a link is now penalized, rather than the receiving websites rankings being penalized by a bad link?**

According to Google, they will completely ignore links they consider as spam. While they may ignore some links, it's still good to use the Disavow tool, especially if you know that you have high-risk links. Gary Illyes also confirmed that webmasters should continue using the Disavow tool. Don't rely on the fact that Google ignores the bad links.

## 4.7 Disavowing bad links

**Q: How often do we need to disavow?**

Penguin 4.0 now detects spam signals in real time. This makes Link Risk Management, the practice of proactive link audits and disavows, even more, important for your business – and we always recommended to do it at least on a weekly basis. Just have in mind that Google crawls the web daily.

**Q: Does it make sense to upload a new Disavow file at this point?**

We always recommended disavowing at least on a weekly basis. Just have in mind that Google crawls the web daily. So at this point, it would make sense to upload a new disavow file if you haven't already.

**Q: What are your thoughts on Google getting rid of the disavow tool? With no disavow, how will webmasters combat malicious black hat linking to your site? Is this now part of the Google algorithm?**

Google never said that it would get rid of the Disavow tool. Gary Illyes confirmed that they still have the tool and we should continue using it. In his statement, he only commented, that Google has “less need” for users disavowing bad links.

<https://twitter.com/methode/status/780457659409412096>

We still think that [using the Disavow tool](#) now that Penguin is part of Google's core Algorithm is very important.

### **Q: Are disavows as effective as they were before Penguin 4.0?**

Google will process the disavows just like they did in the past – when they crawl the links. From that point of view, nothing should change. The question is: will your links get crawled faster? Probably not. This is why we recommend using Link Detox Boost. We built Link Detox Boost to help you push the Google bot into re-crawling the low-quality links you have already asked Google to disavow.

### **Q: With disavow, how important is it to manually contact webmasters to get bad links removed?**

Our recommendation was always first to disavow and then reach out to people to have those links removed. Quite often webmasters will not get back to your link removal requests, but it's always worth a try. We've seen some Penguin penalty recoveries without having any links removed. But have in mind that you need to have the links removed especially when your website has a Manual Action.

### **Q: Will I have a drop in rankings when disavowing toxic links?**

Disavowing Links can always mean a drop in rankings. On the other hand, you risk a Penguin Penalty if you choose not to disavow the high DTOXRISK toxic links. The SEO has to decide, whether to disavow links or not. We recommend using CDTOX and check, which risk level is natural for your market.

### **Q: When I have a site with very little links in a very “clean” market, should I be extra careful with disavows?**

If your market has a very low risk, you should disavow exactly enough to have a Risk on a similarly low level.

### **Q: When I have a domain like domain.com/language (/en /de, etc.), where should I add the disavow file. On the main Domain or the /en?**

In Google Search Console you can add multiple domains, subdomains, and subfolder as properties. We recommend uploading the disavow file to all of them. We also recommend that you have separate properties for http and https and uploading separate disavow files for each.

**Q: We have a lot of spammy links called e.g. thiruyada.xyz – what shall we do?**

You should disavow the entire domain. If you continue to get spammy links from this domain, then Google will not count them in the future if you disavow the whole domain.

**Q: I have a disavow file with about 110 links. What would be the best product to make Google re-crawl the links in it faster?**

We recommend the [Link Detox Boost](#), which is available starting with the Superhero-Account.

**Q: I have a big disavow-file: Should I upload all at once or split it into parts?**

Google only supports a single disavow file. You should start with the riskiest links and then update the disavow file on an ongoing basis.

## 4.8 Spamming and Negative SEO

**Q: Are spammers still getting around it with private link networks?**

Spammers or SEOs in general (remember that SEO is about pushing rankings and influencing Google's results? Google tends to call them Spammers, not to confuse with E-Mail spammers) have always been trying and testing with "private link networks" and will continue to do so.

The success will depend on how good those networks are setup. One popular off-label use for Link Detox from aggressive SEOs is actually to "proof" their networks and reduce the number of factors found in unnatural link networks with it.

**Q: How will the real spammy sites be affected (or benefited) by the little "Penguin 4.0"?**

The "real spammy" varies on a level from "not spammy in Google's, but user's eyes" to "very aggressive link spam". Many SEOs will benefit from the faster responses and higher granularity, which both allow SEO tests to work better.

**Q: Everybody talks about the "real time" factor of the new Penguin. But, what about the more granularity? Will toxic links be less contagious?**

We assume that for massive spamming actions still whole site penalties are possible. After all, "whole domain" is also a granularity, similar to page-level or directory level. Luckily Link Detox supports all of those granularities already since 2014.

**Q: As Google Penguin targets websites with some unnatural links, wouldn't this be a great opportunity for Negative and Black Hat SEOs?**

Black Hat SEO used to be only spamming and jamming, sometimes hacking websites.

Google also refers to Black Hat SEO as building unnatural links from artificial networks or private blog networks. These are more aggressive SEO strategies that worked before 2012. If today, you would build a highly artificial link network for a subpage and this subpage would suddenly drop in rankings, you will see that you have overdone it. When referring to the spamming and jamming towards competitors, then yes, this will just get bigger and bigger now. If you now you get a faster response on link spam, that opens a whole new set of opportunities and risks. This is why we recommend running a [Link Detox](#) report on a regular basis. In very aggressive markets, maybe even on a daily basis.

**Q: If intruder site A links to my website but to a non-existent page, does this create a "Bad Backlink" in my database?**

Since the site links to an error or 404 page, this will probably not affect your rankings. For all the good links to error or 404 pages, we have the [Link Juice Recovery Tool](#). This tool finds links going to 404 pages, which you can redirect to existing pages to recover link power and trust.

**Q: Have you seen a successful Negative SEO attack?**

In the future, we will see many partial penalties, and we expect to see many Negative SEO attacks focused on Subpages or Subfolders. We've seen Negative SEO attacks in the past. Our LRT Certified Professional Ashley Turner wrote a case study about a Google Penalty and Negative SEO attack recovery. Read the [full case study](#) on our blog.

# 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.



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