

The Slap Back

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The data, information, and possible solutions contained
within this report are to be used at your own risk.

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Introduction

Wow, what a week. I can see by the number of people who signed up to receive this report that the Google Slap is affecting a whole load of people, and I suspect far more than Google imagined.

If you take just my circle of friends and associates, Google has lost just over \$27,000 in ad revenue (based on their normal spend) in the last seven days alone. That's a whopping \$1.4M in lost revenue over a years period... and that's just a small group of people.

But perhaps that is the plan. Kick out a significant chunk of AdWords advertisers, and then be arrogant enough to provide them with a new way to pay ... namely CPA ads.

CPA ads are in themselves a great idea, being able to pay a fixed price for a defined action such as a signup or a sale has its obvious benefits but it also has the potential to put a lot of people out of business, why?

Because advertisers with deep pockets could afford to make a loss on the initial sale to both kill the competition, and if they are clever make a back end sale. For example:

I sell a product for \$67, back-end sales to buyers of the product are \$37.50 averaged across all purchasers (roughly 21% buy the back end product). By bidding \$67 on the CPA I am effectively losing money because of processing charges etc but I am still making \$37.50 in profits over the long term. Now that is no where near the \$105.50 (before processing charges) I currently make on average out of each customer, but it is still a profit.

Now this is just pure speculation, and I am sure when CPA ads come into play it will not be that extreme, but I do believe it has the potential to push smaller advertisers out of the larger markets.

That being said, I actually just think that Google screwed up a little with this update. Over the weekend I had a chat with my man in the know and he said that ad clicks were being hit pretty hard (and in turn implied revenue), and the call volume to account reps had jumped through the roof... I don't think it will be too long before things become a little more fair...

Still, I don't think things will change completely back, so let's get into how we can fix the problem right now and actually stay in business :)

Understanding Quality Score

There is a lot of speculation in various forums about what Quality Score is and how it is determined, some of it accurate, some complete drivel. With the tests that myself and my associates have performed this week I think we now have a good understanding of how it works and ultimately how to game it.

So here goes with a definition:

“Quality Score is a value placed on an individual domain that reflects the quality of the content contained within it”

Ok, quite a generic definition, but as an overall statement it is true. How they determine the quality score though is quite complex and is built on a large number of variables. Below I am going to go into these in some more detail, and present a solution to getting your AdWord campaigns back on track, but first I want to clarify the statement '***placed on an individual domain***'.

Domain Level Quality

The quality score which Google generates is at the domain level. There has been a lot of talk about the actual landing page being scored, and while this is factored into the equation, it is the quality of the whole domain that bears the most influence on your AdWords advertising.

Domain level scoring means that you can have an amazing landing page with a ton content on, but if Google thinks the rest of your site is a heap of shit then you are going to be slapped... and hard.

We came to this conclusion through a series of tests using multiple AdWords accounts, domains, keywords, and landing pages. Over 170 tests were used to make this determination, and although there were a few exceptions to the rules we believe that quality scoring is based on the whole domain rather than an individual page, or an individual ad or keyword.

Keyword Triggers

Now I don't want to sound like I am contradicting myself but the keywords you choose also affects things. Certain keywords such as 'credit cards', 'home insurance', 'loans', as well as trademarked names have a strong bearing on how Google evaluates your Ad.

Google are still using the quality score of your domain, but are setting the quality requirements higher. For example:

Let's assume that quality score is on a scale of 1-10 with 1 being the lowest.

Your site all about 'chocolate making' has a score of 6. Bidding on keywords such as 'chocolate making', or 'hot chocolate' might normally only require that your site has a quality of 5 to be unaffected by the Google Slap.

But if you bid on the term 'cadbury', Google will recognize it as a trademarked term and require your quality score to be 8 or above to show your ad.

The examples above are only made up and at the moment we only have a guesstimate of the quality scoring levels, but we have tested the theory with multiple sites and found this again to be true.

How Is Quality Defined

Below is a list of how I believe quality is defined for your domain. By no means is this an exhaustive list, and there have been tests which contradict the list below but ticking as many of these boxes as possible is a good place to start.

Domain Age

Although slightly unfair, domains which are not at least one year old do have an impact on your quality score. Sites with good content which are new can still be unaffected, but aged domains do perform better.

Number Of Indexed Pages

If you got to Google and type in site:yourdomain.com, Google will show you how many pages from yourdomain.com are indexed. Now there is no magic number on how many pages you should have indexed to get a better quality score, but it is important to get some indexed.

Now for most people with a typical site this is not a big problem, if you have had a site up for any length of time you are almost guaranteed to have content indexed, but if you are doing AdSense arbitrage, have one page NameSqueeze, or single page sales letters then there is a good chance that you won't have attempted to get the site indexed as there was previously no need.

As I said above, there is no magic number of pages to get indexed, in the tests we did, most of the sites with 25-40 pages performed just as well as sites with 300+ pages. I will be doing some more tests on this in the coming week.

Landing Page

There is quite a bit of debate on the importance of the quality of the landing page itself, in the majority of the tests we performed, just having a form with a few keywords on the page (even less content than a typical squeeze page) fared no worse than a full page of content and no form at all, as long as the page was on a domain with a good (or what we believe to be) quality score.

Where the landing page was on a lower quality site, having a squeeze page as the landing page instead of a pure content page penalized the site. Contrary to popular belief, Google is

looking for NameSqueeze forms and can do so easily by looking at the form actions, for example, any site which uses Aweber will have the following line in the source:

```
<form method="post" action="http://www.aweber.com/scripts/addlead.pl">
```

I personally think that the landing page IS scored, but on a ad group by ad group basis. I think Google looks at the keywords being used in the ad group and evaluates the content of the page to check the relevance. (also see keyword triggers above)

I think this relevance score is then used to weight the overall quality score of the domain which is then in turn used to determine whether to limit traffic (by setting your budget really low, but not showing that), or to disable keywords and ask for a higher minimum bid to enable them.

Now I know this sounds complicated but at the end of the day, having targeted landing pages is what Google wants, they don't want people typing ice cream, being shown an ad for ice cream then when they click, being sent to a site about Pizza.

One thing that is important on your landing page is to have links off to other sections of the site. This I believe is also important on sites with high quality scores (though to a lesser degree)

Privacy Page

Google has openly said to many of my associates that a privacy page is important, which got me thinking.

I know that the sites are quality scored by bots, now detecting NameSqueeze pages is a trivial matter, and so would be looking for certain privacy related keywords etc but a few people have reported that Google said that their privacy page was not detailed enough.

Now one of the things I do on a few of my sites is implement the P3P XML based privacy policy system. You can read more about this here:

<http://www.w3.org/P3P/>

This is a **MACHINE READABLE** privacy policy framework designed so browsers can alert users based on their privacy settings. This would be a perfect fit for Google to detect the privacy settings of the site.

Now I haven't done enough tests yet to determine if they were checking for this, but if I were a gambling man, I would definitely put my money on it. ***Update:** early tests indicate that Google are using this information, I should know more or so in a weeks time.

Also take a look at the Compact Privacy Policy if you are thinking about adding P3P to your site. (add both)

Site Maps

There are basically two flavors of site maps, ones you generate and link all your pages from (the traditional variety), and the other which is Google's own system. If you don't know what a Google Site Map is then take a look here:

<http://www.google.com/sitemaps/>

Google site maps are machine readable, and although my early tests didn't show any significant difference in using them or not, after to speaking to my guy, I would personally recommend that you use them on your site.

I would still put up a traditional site map to make sure that Google still crawls anyway (hey it can't do any harm), but if you are suffering from a Google slap then this is an easy thing to add and there is plenty of free software out there to generate them.

Contact Us Page

Many people who have spoken to Google in the last week or so have reported that apart from Google mentioning privacy pages, they also say that there should be a contact us page.

From the tests I can say not having a contact us page seems to make no difference, perhaps it is just a standard line being spun by Google staff. At the same time, it would not hurt to add one in for the couple of minutes it takes.

Google AdSense

Tests show that unless you are on a domain with high quality, adding AdSense to your landing pages is pretty much a killer. I have seen sites advertising in AdWords with an overall low quality score that still have AdSense on, and to be honest I am not sure how they are surviving, But generally, if you don't have a high quality score then don't put AdSense on your landing pages.

Incoming Links

Good quality incoming links are important to increasing your quality score, they are not the be all and end all of it as I believe (and the tests show) that a site can have a good quality score with only a few incoming links. But you should have a few.

At the end of the day, a sites quality is influenced by PR, but a high PR site doesn't mean it is a high quality site. On most occasions these do go hand in hand, but this is not always the case.

Steps To Slap Back

Google have made some devastating changes for a lot of us, but getting back in the game is actually not that hard. Granted, it takes a little more work than it previously did but on the whole, nothing more than a few days effort, and a little wait to get indexed.

Here is a break down of some of the things you should be doing.

Adding Content To Your Site

The quickest and easiest way to do this is to install a blog. Blogs get indexed faster because of the ping process (also don't forget to ping Technorati and have your keywords as names in your blog). If you have an eBook you are selling then you can take the content of it and add it bit by bit to your blog (there is also plenty of software out there to do this automatically for you on a daily basis)... This will rarely affect your sales... (if you are really against using your product as content then consider using your bonus material)

Get A New Domain

If you have already been slapped then you are going to need to make some changes to get in Google's good books again, unfortunately no one knows how quickly Google will come back and re-evaluate your site (or whether it is just an incremental thing that happens when indexing occurs)...

So the choices are...

- 1) Wait it out and start adding content today and hope that you get indexed and re-assessed pronto.
- 2) Get a new domain, add content, get indexed, start advertising again.

Throughout the last weeks testing we have noticed a few sites come back alive just by adding content to them, others which we have worked on and got a few backlinks, removed trademark keywords, and added content to have not changed at all. (even though both sites have had the content show up in the index)... so who knows what the best solution is at this moment in time. I guess a few more weeks will yield the answer.

Get Some Incoming Links

Incoming links can be bought (but be careful), add your site to a few directories. The thing you need to do is get some incoming links but not too many all at once.

Add A Privacy Policy And Contact Us Page

This is easy enough to do, the P3P process looks scary if you are not a techie but there are plenty of free P3P generators out there that walk you through the process... Just take your time and go through it, or offer \$20 on rentacoder.com to get someone to do it for you.

Build A Site Map

Again, not too hard to do especially with the free tools. One of the new features of Google Site Maps is its ability to alert you to problems that Google recognizes with your site such as hidden text etc.

Add Links To Your Landing Pages

Make sure that your landing pages have links to your privacy page, contact us page, and most importantly to a content page. Make sure your content page links to your site map, which in turn should link to all your other content pages. If you are using a blog to build your content then you can probably get away without a HTML based site map, but I would still be generating a new Google site map every couple of days.

Things You Shouldn't Be Doing

Using Spam Page Generators

Programs like Directory Generator and Traffic Equalizer all have their place, but you shouldn't be using them on your money sites. Google can easily detect these programs now and you really don't need the extra hassle of getting your site blacklisted at the moment.

Adding AdSense

Unless you are actually into AdSense arbitrage then get rid of the AdSense ads for now. If you still want to go down the arbitrage route then get building a quality content site that you can use for all your arbitrage landing pages.

Phoning Google

Although this can be a quick way to get your site re-scored, I would personally recommend that you wait it out for the bot to pay a visit. Remember, you might have a Google Rep, but he still works for Google and you don't want to be showing them your every hand, and as I have experienced in the past, a manual override might only last as long as the next visit by the bot.

One exception to this rule is if you have a campaign with really good history that you want to preserve, AND you have added all of the things I suggest, AND you have all your new pages indexed.

Adding A Million Keywords

Unless you have a good quality score, then adding a huge number of keywords into an ad group in one go seems to instantly slap your site. We have also noticed a knock on effect on your AdWord account as a whole. e.g.

The AdWord account has 3 campaigns running, none are being slapped, you create a new campaign and dump a load of keywords into it then all the campaigns get slapped. We are not sure why this is happening as it doesn't fit with the whole quality score things but it is definitely happening.

Conclusions

As you will notice, a few of my recommendations have changed since the last report, this is the result of testing, testing some more, then going back and testing again. In a few weeks time things will probably change once more. The information contained in this report should only be taken as a guideline, do your own tests, see what works for you, and if you find anything useful (no matter how small it may seem) then please report back and let me know.

Most of the things that you have to do to get your quality up are the same things you should be doing for basic SEO. Google as a company want the AdWords sites to feel more like the sites that visitors get to from an organic search.

While I do feel they have gone to far in this change, and I think they will probably ease off the kill button in the coming weeks, I still think though that a quality score will remain to some degree, and you might as well get working now, and if you are doing a little bit more than your competition then its more money in your bank account.

My whole theory about quality score differers quite a bit from the official line which can be read here

<https://adwords.google.com/support/bin/answer.py?answer=38197>

<https://adwords.google.com/select/siteguidelines.html>

This could mean I am completely wrong, or that Google is not telling you the whole story. This is something for you to decide.

I have also received quite a lot of emails from people who know I am into black hat SEO and want to know what I am doing in this regard. I have decided not to include any of this in the report as anybody can read this and I would prefer it if Google didn't know everything that can be done to game the system.

Finally I just want to say good luck in giving Google a little slap back, and if you feel that this report will benefit anyone then please send them to:

<http://wuranga.com/reports/googleslap/>

Please use the URL above rather than just providing them with a download link. I do intend to update this report as more information comes in and if you only send them the PDF then they will not get the updates (I said that in the last report but some bright spark... yes you know who you are) posted the download address instead... (un-hyperlinked so they thought I wouldn't pick up any referring info) shame on you... lol

Also don't forget to look out for my Niche Domination Report which will be coming soon.

The usual disclaimer applies: Results may vary, anything you do may piss Google off, non of these things may work for you, your computer could explode from over use, income levels may vary, and hot coffee could burn your mouth.