

## Expanding Your Web Presence

### Overview

When Organic Marketing (SEO) techniques are applied, the expectation is that search engine rankings should improve. However, in some cases, there are external circumstances at work that prevent ranking improvements. These circumstances fall into 3 basic groups:

- On-Page factors
- Off-Page factors
- Other unknown conditions

We know that search engines impose several kinds of penalties and demotions. The most severe is banning. In these cases, search engines completely remove a website for all its keyword rankings. In Google such conditions can typically be identified by performing an "info:" (info colon) query to see if a domain is part of a search engines' index. If not, the site is likely banned and requires a correction to the inappropriate practice and a re-inclusion request. Even then, there is no guarantee the search engine will re-include a banned website.

The more obscure penalties come in the form of a ranking demotion. Website pages that would otherwise rank higher are forced to a lower rank. This condition is most often caused by "near duplicate" content (content that closely resembles content on another domain's website). However, there are many other conditions that could trigger a demotion.

The last condition is not a penalty at all but rather a mis-judgment of the pages "strength" to earn a desired ranking. The most common cause for this condition is an improper assessment of the quality of backlinks (links that reside on other websites which point to other website pages). Backlinks may be discounted by the search engines for a variety of reasons which result in lower than anticipated rankings.

The banned site condition is relatively easy to detect as apposed to the other two conditions that are very difficult to expose. It is like looking for the proverbial "needle in a haystack". There are so many conditions that could trigger a penalty/demotion that at best, the discovery process is a 50 / 50 proposition.

### Discovery Process

The best chance of eliminating a search engine penalty/demotion is to follow a robust discovery process that can take in excess of 10 man-hours and eliminate possible causes.

The process starting point depends on ranking symptoms. If low competitive keywords are ranking well, but not more competitive keywords, the issues are likely to be related to link quality. If, however, even low competitive keywords are not ranking well, problems with On-Site issues are more likely.

On-Site issues are more easily solved as webmasters have greater control than Off-Page Link quality issues. As aberrant conditions are found, corrections should be made as soon as possible.

Off-Page Link tests are, at best, subjective and time consuming. Specialized tools are used to assess backlink quality.

Even with a robust process, there may be issues causing ranking penalties/demotions that cannot be isolated or corrected.

### Ranking Recovery

Search Engines like Google take a long time to re-rank a page that had been penalized. For simple corrections, rankings may return in as little as 30 days. But most likely, search engines will take between 90-120 days.

