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Searches for
"negative SEO"

April 2012



Shortly after Google refreshed the Penguin algorithm in October of 2012, Matt Cutts announced the creation of a new tool, the disavow tool, which would allow site owners to ask Google not to count links that they felt could damage their site. [Matt stated](#) that the vast majority of sites would not need to use the tool and that Google's algorithms were really quite good at making sure that these bad links would not hurt your site. But, he did admit that it could potentially be a concern for people in high money, competitive niches, saying, "For the people who are in maybe super competitive poker, casino, whatever kind of niches and they're worried about, 'OK, what if someone is trying to do some ill will towards my site?' we've just released a new tool called disavow links."

If you read through the [transcriptions](#) of things that Matt Cutts and John Mueller have said about negative SEO, here are the points that Google seems to be emphasizing:

- Google works hard to ensure that a competitor cannot hurt your site by pointing bad links at it.
- They have things built into their algorithms to help determine whether the links are self made or not. For example, if there has been a pattern of unnatural linking that has been occurring for many years, then it's not likely that a competitor is at fault.
- If you notice a bunch of bad looking links pointing at your site, most likely they are not going to do any harm to you. But, Google admits that they may not get things 100% correct all of the time and as such, it's not a bad idea to disavow any spammy looking links that you see.
- If you see a situation where you feel that negative SEO is actually being effective, Google would like you to report it either in the webmaster forums or by [contacting John Mueller](#) and they will look into the situation to see if they can improve their algorithms.
- The vast majority of cases where people report negative SEO attacks to Google end up NOT being negative SEO.

Examples of things that are NOT negative SEO

I can't tell you how many times I have had a client claim that a competitor is attacking them with bad links when in most cases, this probably isn't true. If you start looking at your backlink profile and seeing some

odd looking links it's a normal reaction to think, "I didn't make these spammy links! So, if I didn't make them, who did? It must be my competitor!"

Here are some examples of situations where negative SEO was suspected, but in reality there is another explanation for what is going on:

Example #1: "Weird" links are not necessarily bad links

There are some websites that link out to almost every site on the web. For example, most sites will have links from sites like:

- askives.com
- mrwhatis.net
- m.biz (and hundreds of m.biz clone directories. I don't know where these come from, but although it's probably not necessary, I disavow them just to be safe. In my opinion, they're not likely negative SEO though.)
- directories that have scraped dmoz.org
- links from sites that analyze and provide domain info
- Chinese sites that scrape alexa.com

...and so on.

Example #2: Sitewide links are not all bad links

I've seen site owners get really upset when they look at their "Links to your site" section of Webmaster Tools and see something like this:

Links to Your Site



The fear is that Google is going to think that you built tens of thousands of links to your site. Now, in the example that I have given, where the site is a well known one like yellowpages.com, it may be a little more clear that this is not an unnatural link. But, what if a site owner in your niche really liked your content and linked to you in their sidebar? And what if they linked to you with a keyword? Underneath "Links to your site" in Webmaster Tools is a section called, "How your data is linked" that contains your most commonly used anchor text. So, if I got a sitewide link from a site with thousands of pages and they linked with a keyword, I'm going to see that Google thinks that the majority of my links are keyword anchored. Oh no!

I've had people think that they've been hit by negative SEO because they have seen a single keyword anchored sitewide link. In my opinion, Google is pretty good at figuring out that a sitewide link is really just **one** vote from a site. A single sitewide link is not a sign of negative SEO even if it causes thousands of links to appear in Webmaster Tools.

Example #3: Your old habits are coming back to haunt you

Have you ever in the past purchased a link building package? For example, years ago when I was learning SEO I purchased a citation building package to one of my sites. It was one of those deals where you pay \$100 and you get a whole bunch of directory listings. (Yeah...I'm not proud of it, but hey...we all had to start learning somewhere.) I've since cleaned up those links. But, the amazing thing is that they keep replicating. I will often see new links appear that are using the same text that I used when I purchased that package. It would be easy for me to say, "Hey! I haven't built any links in years...and now I'm seeing spammy directory listings appear. This must be a competitor pointing bad links at me!" But really, my own actions were the cause for these unnatural links.

Example #4: A well-meaning employee or friend is building you links

You might laugh at this example, but I've seen it happen. I had a client who contacted me for help with a manual unnatural links penalty. He swore he had never purchased or built a link in his life, but his backlink profile was full of a lot of pretty manipulative stuff. He assumed it had to be a competitor doing this. As we were doing the cleanup for his site we noticed new bad links that were appearing. Agh! We're under attack! Well, it turns out that the site owner's nephew had been doing some reading about SEO. I am not kidding. He thought he was helping his uncle out by SEOing his site for him. Oy vey.

Example #5: A previous SEO made these links

Some people are shocked when they find out that their SEO company has been building them unnatural links. I have seen many cases where an SEO company promised they were going to give a site "White hat links" or links that were within the Google guidelines, but in reality it looks like they outsourced the job to a cheap linkbuilding company that created spammy bookmarks, blog comments and forum signatures.

If you've got unnatural links and you've ever hired an SEO company, there is a good chance that those bad links were actually made on purpose and that YOU paid for them! Remember, prior to April of 2012, these links used to work well to rank pages and very few websites would get penalized for using them.

Example #6: You've been hacked

While someone *could* negative SEO your site by hacking into it, not all cases of hacking are negative SEO. A while back, a friend of mine emailed me and said, "Hey! Did you know that one of your sites is ranking highly for Michael Kors handbags?" His suggestion was that I take advantage of that and throw an affiliate page up on the site. :) I had a look at the backlinks and here's what I saw:

	# Referring Domains Count	Referring Domains with Anchor	# Referring Pages Count	Referring Pages with Anchor	# Anchor Text
1.	9	14%	12	0.01%	
2.	8	12%	63,214	63%	replica michael kors handbags high quality
3.	7	11%	33,540	33%	michael kors handbags on sale discount
4.	5	8%	3,546	4%	ugg australia boots
5.	4	6%	19	0.02%	
6.	3	5%	9	0.01%	
7.	3	5%	4	0.00%	
8.	3	5%	4	0.00%	michael kors handbags cheap online
9.	2	3%	2	0.00%	discount ugg boots classic tall

Crap.

This was not a competitor trying to hurt my rankings. In fact, the tens of thousands of spammy links that were pointing at my site were actually *helping* my rankings at that point. What had happened here is that someone had taken advantage of a vulnerability in a Wordpress plugin that had not been updated. They were able to hack into the site and create a whole bunch of new pages. They then pointed huge numbers of spammy links at these pages and redirected them to their Michael Kors affiliate sites.

If you are looking at your backlink profile and you see odd keyword anchors for things like viagra, cialis, casinos, payday loans, ugg boots, etc, then there is a good chance that you have been hacked. In most cases these links can be removed by finding and removing the pages that the hacker created on your site. However, if you have been hacked, it's a good idea to have someone familiar with cleaning up hacks look at your site to figure out how the hacker got in and how you can close that door.

In this situation, we removed the offending pages, found and fixed the access point, AND I also disavowed all of those links. According to Google, if you get hacked and have bad links pointing to you, you can probably ignore them because their algorithms are good at picking up and just discounting this sort of thing. However, it concerned me that these bad links actually were helping this site. If Google was just discounting them then they should have had no effect. I am 99% sure that I would have been ok to leave them, especially since the pages they pointed to had been removed (which also removes the link pointing to that page), but just to be absolutely sure that something odd didn't affect me with the next Penguin update, I disavowed them all at the domain level.

I now have alerts on Google Alerts and Moz Freshweb Explorer set up to help me determine when someone is hacking my site. To do so for your sites, in each of these tools you can set up alerts for things like:

- site:yoursite.com "michael kors"
- site:yoursite.com viagra
- site:yoursite.com casino
- site:yoursite.com "payday loans"
- site:yoursite.com "cialis"

...and so on.

Signs of things that COULD be negative SEO

I said at the start of this article that the vast majority of cases of suspected negative SEO that I see really aren't negative SEO after all. But, there are situations where it does indeed happen. Here is the type of link that you can commonly see when someone is trying to attack you with negative links:

- Links from foreign forums
- A huge number of links from sites with TLDs of .ru, .cz, .cn, .pl, .ro, .bg, .biz, .com.ar, .com.br and .info. Not all of those links are going to be unnatural, but if you are suddenly getting an influx of links from russian sites, it could be a sign of an attack.
- A large number of links from complete nonsense blog posts:

This Business Charge card statement delivers a fabulous sorted score associated with each of purchases designed and also all the power to make itemized people send. Figuring out by which all dime will be expended will probably permit the small business proprietor towards reduce expenses in which wanted and also boost for investments that can be displaying some sort of gain. The particular important goal in working at business is that will put together an important revenue along with that will stay inside online business. Therefore keeping track associated with every last acquire made and bill compensated is normally tremendously vital around operating a prosperous small business. Precise records in your finger tips will be able to help in controlling cash circulation using accuracy, producing perfect decisions, making any revenue along with inevitably staying around enterprise since that small business increase. It features all **Psychology Today Articles Dreams** and **Htc Mytouch 4G Slide** questions and answers.

- Lots of keyword-anchored links from multiple sources. (I'd like to reiterate that receiving one sitewide link from a questionable source is not a sign of negative SEO, even if you are suddenly seeing thousands of links coming from that site.)
- An influx of links from bad neighbourhoods such as porn sites, gambling sites, payday loan sites, etc.

There are many other tricky techniques that can be used to attack sites with negative SEO, but most sites will not need to worry about these tactics. (I'll explain more about whether or not you need to worry below, so keep reading!) I'm not about to describe all of the different ways you can do negative SEO, as I don't want to give any evil people any ideas. But, the one tactic that I will mention and that you can keep an eye on is someone redirecting penalized sites to yours. Take a look right now at your site on ahrefs.com. You don't need a membership to see whether you've got redirects pointing to you. Scroll down until you see "backlink types" and then "redirect".

Backlink Types:	
text	44,147
dofollow	35,054
nofollow	9,093
sitewide	145
not sitewide	44,142
redirect	66
image	615
form	54
Governmental	8
Educational	52

Now, not all redirects are bad. If you have affiliates, they may have pages that redirect to your product pages. These are usually okay, and there are many other valid reasons for a site to redirect to yours. But if today you see that you have three sites redirecting to you and next week you've got 30 or even 300 sites redirecting to you, then this could be a sign of a problem.

Can these redirects hurt you, though? Can an influx of bad links hurt you? Do you need to worry?

Google has given [conflicting advice in this regard](#). In one place, they have said that bad link signals will definitely pass through a 301 redirect, but in another place they have said that attempting to 301 redirect a penalized site to a clean site will not cause a penalty on the clean site. In my opinion, what Google is saying here is that if you are redirecting one of your own sites to another of your own sites, then they'll pass the bad link signals. It's just like you building your own unnatural links. But if you try to 301 to someone else's site then they won't let those links count. How does Google know the difference? That's part of the secret sauce. I do think that they use all sorts of signals to determine whether links are self made or made by a competitor.

Should you worry about negative SEO?

OK, so let's say you see evidence that someone is attacking your site with unnatural links. Does this mean you are going to lose your rankings?

Google really does work hard to algorithmically protect sites from this type of link causing a problem. And, I would say that **for the vast majority of you who are reading this post, you DO NOT NEED TO WORRY ABOUT NEGATIVE SEO.**

Yes, just shouted there. **I really want to emphasize that most sites do not need to worry.**

This is the point in the article where the black hatters start getting upset. I wonder who the first person will be to post a comment saying, "You don't know what you're talking about! Negative SEO works because I've done it on hundreds of sites." Or, "I know negative SEO works because my site got taken down."

Here is my opinion on the types of sites that could possibly be adversely affected by a link based negative SEO attack:

- Sites in very competitive, high-money niches such as casinos, payday loans, insurance, pharmacy sales, etc. - People who are running negative SEO in these circles have more knowledge of sophisticated methods that just may possibly work. Some of these people spend hours and hours trying to find loopholes in Google's algorithm that will allow them to take down a competitor. When Google adjusts their algorithms to be able to combat those methods then these people spend even more hours trying to beat the system. They also have huge budgets that they can throw into a negative SEO attack. For the average small business owner to pay someone to do a high level intensive SEO attack that has the potential to work, it would likely cost more money than it would cost to implement regular SEO methods on your own site.
- Sites that have a long standing history of doing their own manipulative linking. If you have received a manual link-based penalty in the past or have been affected negatively by the Penguin algorithm, then in my opinion you really should keep a watch out for additional unnatural links pointing to your site. In a hangout, John Mueller spoke about a [situation](#) where Google may not be certain whether to discount bad links that look like negative SEO because the site itself had a lot of signals that indicated that the site owner had been engaging in webspam. He implied that Google may not be able to tell what was self made and what was an attack:

"It's something where we see these problematic links and we don't really know how we should react to that. It's not that we can just close our eyes and say, 'Oh well... we can recognize these problematic links and ignore them. It's more that we don't know what we should do with all of the other signals that we find attached to your website'"

In these cases, if it does appear that negative SEO is being targeted at your website, the best tool you have is to do monthly monitoring of your backlinks.

How can you protect yourself from negative SEO?

If you are in a competitive niche, or if you have a history of being penalized and having to do link cleanup, then you really should be monitoring your backlinks regularly. What we do for our regular link audit clients is a monthly backlink audit. This really should be frequent enough to find and clean up unnatural links. However, if you are under a strong attack where new unnatural links are coming in daily, it may be a good idea to do this cleanup every one-to-two weeks.

It's not a bad idea for other sites that are at low risk of succumbing to a negative SEO attack to do a monthly link audit as well. What we have found is that when you monitor your new links monthly, you can easily see the new, good links that your site is attracting. This can give you a lot of ideas on how to get even more links. If you see, for example, that a few people had recommended a particular product of yours via a link from forum posts, then you may want to create more content surrounding that product and engage on an email outreach campaign to get more people to link to that content.

But wait....why would I recommend doing a regular link audit if Google says that they can catch negative SEO and discount it? The reason is that you're relying on an algorithm and the algorithm is not going to be 100% accurate. Here are some quotes from John Mueller of Google regarding their accuracy on catching and discounting negative SEO:

"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."

"We do work very hard to make sure that third party effects like that don't play a role within the search results. It's something we can't absolutely guarantee that we'll always get it right. So, if you're seeing something like this you're welcome to let us know about that. "

"If you're looking at the links in Webmaster Tools for example I might go ahead and submit a disavow file for those links. In general though, we do recognize these kind of situations and handle them appropriately. "

How to do your backlink audit

There are many different ways to do a backlink audit. Some people will use automated link auditing tools, but if you do choose to do this it is vitally important that you do a manual audit alongside of the automated suggestions. I can't tell you how many failed reconsideration requests I have seen because people have relied solely on these reports. I have also seen these tools recommend disavowing some fantastic natural links as well. In my opinion, you must look at your links manually!

If you are working on a site that does not have a history of unnatural linking, you can probably get away with just using the links that you get from Webmaster Tools. Google has said in the past that Webmaster Tools links are "all you need". However, John Mueller and Matt Cutts have clarified that statement saying

that they are all you need in order to pick up your *patterns* of unnatural linking. This is fine if you are lucky enough to have a complete list of all of the links that have been ever made on your behalf, but if you don't have that then you're likely going to have to go looking to other sources to find all of these links. We have come across many unnatural links that are indexed in Google and not reported in Webmaster Tools. And, we've even been given some of these as examples on failed reconsideration requests. The links you see in Webmaster Tools are just a sample of your links. As such, we use links from the following sources:

- Webmaster Tools (Recent)
- Webmaster Tools (Sample)
- ahrefs.com (a paid tool)
- majesticseo.com (a paid tool, but it's free for your own site if you verify your site)
- opensiteexplorer.org (This is Moz's tool, and for most sites you can get a good number of your links for free provided you register an account with Moz. I would say though that I find that Open Site Explorer tends to pick up more of the **good** links and doesn't catch as much as the overt spam as Ahrefs and Majestic.

We then sort the links into a more manageable list so that we only analyze one link from each domain. If you are doing monthly audits, you will want to keep track of which domains you have already audited so that you don't waste time assessing that domain again. You can use a VLOOKUP formula in Excel to highlight which domains you have already audited in previous months. You can use a similar VLOOKUP to highlight domains that are already in your disavow file.

It took me a while to understand how VLOOKUP works. There are many tutorials out there, but here is my simple explanation:

- Let's assume that your link auditing spreadsheet is "Sheet1" and you have a list of your disavowed domains on "Sheet2". Let's say that column A of each sheet contains your domains and column B of "Sheet2" contains the words "in disavow".
- Let's assume that you have 1000 domains on "Sheet2". Again, this is your list of disavowed domains.
- On "Sheet1" create a new column and enter this formula:
=VLOOKUP(A1, Sheet2!\$A\$1:\$B\$1000,2,FALSE).
- Now, copy that formula down the entire column. You will end up having each row saying either "in disavow" or "N/A".
- For those domains that are in your disavow, you don't need to re-audit them because you have already disavowed them.

I have prepared hundreds of link audit spreadsheets. This summer I dedicated a huge amount of time to creating and programming a system that allows me to keep track of my monthly audit clients and create awesome spreadsheets for manual link audits. The sheet that is produced chooses the best link from each domain to audit, eliminates domains that I have already audited for each client, marks the nofollows,

marks which links are keyword anchors, and marks which domains have already been disavowed (and also takes into account subdomains when you have disavowed the full domain.) It also tells me whether or not each domain is my list of tens of thousands of domains that I call my "disavow blacklist" and also my whitelist that contains domains that I know contains links not made for SEO purposes such as sites like alexa.com, aboutus.org, known dmoz scrapers and so on.

This system saves me a huge amount of time, especially for those clients for whom we do regular backlink audits. I want to thank Moz for allowing me to mention this system. I am now making it available for others to use (for a fee). You can get more details [here](#).

The next step, once you have audited your links and determined which ones are ones that were made to manipulate Google, and are therefore unnatural, is to add these sites to your disavow file. You almost always want to disavow these domains on the domain level. This means including "domain:example.com" rather than "http://www.example.com/page1.html".

Once this is done, add these domains to your existing disavow file and upload it to the disavow tool. Don't worry...there is no harm in submitting regular disavows.

Summary

I have covered a lot of info in this post and hopefully I haven't confused too many people. The topic of negative SEO really is a tough one to understand. On one hand Google says, "Don't worry about it." But, on the other hand they tell us that although it shouldn't be a problem, it's not a bad idea to disavow any spam links you find pointing to your site even if you didn't make them.

Here are the takehome points of this article:

- Not everything that looks like negative SEO is negative SEO. All sites have weird links pointing to them. Don't always assume that every odd looking link is one that a competitor has made.
- A sudden influx of odd links very well could be an attack.
- In most cases, if a site does get attacked by a competitor pointing spammy links at them, Google's algorithms will just ignore those links and you won't see a drop in rankings.
- If you are in a hyper-competitive niche then you are much more likely to fall victim to a sophisticated negative SEO attack.
- If you have a history of doing a lot of unnatural linking yourself then you could fall victim as well, as Google may not be able to tell the difference between your unnatural links and the attack links.
- Sites that are not in a competitive niche and have not been engaging in manipulative linking, most likely do not need to worry about negative SEO.
- In any case, if you think you are under a negative SEO attack, it is a good idea to audit your links regularly and submit a disavow file.

Negative SEO always brings up interesting discussion. Have you been a victim? Do you do monthly audits? Do you feel that Google is good at preventing negative SEO?

About MarieHaynes —

Marie Haynes is insanely obsessed with trying to understand how Google works. Her company, [Marie Haynes Consulting Inc.](#), focuses on helping businesses improve their Google rankings. She offers a biweekly [newsletter](#) that gives actionable tips for intermediate and advanced SEOs. Marie speaks regularly at SEO conferences usually on the topic of Google Penalties, Google's Penguin algorithm, and Google-Friendly SEO.

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What is Negative SEO? | Learn About Negative SEO Attacks

Negative SEO: How to Identify and Recover From Intentional Bad Links and Spam

Have you heard stories about negative SEO? Perhaps you've actually heard that negative SEO is a myth and can't actually be done? Or do you suspect that you're the victim of negative SEO on your own website, due to an influx of spammy links?

Regardless of what you may have actually heard about negative SEO, on this page we'll be explaining this topic in as much detail as possible. We'll explain what negative search engine optimization is, how common it is, and how you can evaluate whether you are or aren't the victim of it.

If you want to learn more, keep reading, and give us a call at **888-256-9448**. We provide our services to clients across the country, so whether you need [SEO services in D.C.](#) or [lead generation in Columbus](#), we've got you covered.

If you've been hit with negative SEO, WebFX can help.

A negative SEO definition can be difficult to come by, as the topic is scarcely discussed, and it's also somewhat broad. However, we'll attempt to make it as clear as possible. **Negative SEO is any malicious attempt taken against your site in an attempt to harm your rankings.**

Negative search engine optimization isn't necessarily the result of your competitors trying to outrank you. Although most people assume that negative SEO happens when a competitor attacks you, it can also be the result of an individual with a vendetta and significant SEO resources at their disposal.

When Does Negative SEO Happen?

Negative SEO usually happens when another individual or company has a very strong desire to push you out of the rankings for a specific keyword. It can happen at any time—after you have been around for several years, or while you are a new company.

How Common is Negative SEO?

Google tries to make negative SEO very difficult to accomplish. Additionally, it takes a significant amount of time, resources, and ability to launch a negative SEO attack against another website.

Moz's Dr. Pete has a thorough review of negative SEO, and the likelihood of it happening to you, [in this post](#). Although some of his remarks are meant to be humorous, he does have a good point: attacks against your site are not all that common, and what many people think is an attack is really just typical behavior.

Many common events are usually mistaken for negative SEO. As Dr. Pete says, if your link profile—that is, the overall landscape of links pointing to your site, ranging from positive to negative—is mostly bad, some random links that occur without reason could push it past the breaking point and cause you to acquire a penalty. You may perceive this as an attack, but it could really be partially your own doing.

Google also tries to make negative SEO difficult to accomplish by disregarding “junk” links that build up over time. Since anyone can link to anything with or without reason, Google isn't going to penalize you for getting links from sites you've never contacted that have nothing to do with you. Essentially, the bigger you get, the more random links you'll obtain, and the less weight Google will put in them.

Let's take a look at what else might make you think you're undergoing a negative SEO attack, and how you can rule it out.

Video: How to Identify Black Hat SEO



Digital Marketing That Drives Results™

SEO FAQ: What is Black Hat SEO?

I Think I Might Be Under Attack...

If you think you've been hit by negative SEO, there are a few things you'll need to rule out first.

Here are the three things most commonly mistaken for negative SEO attacks:

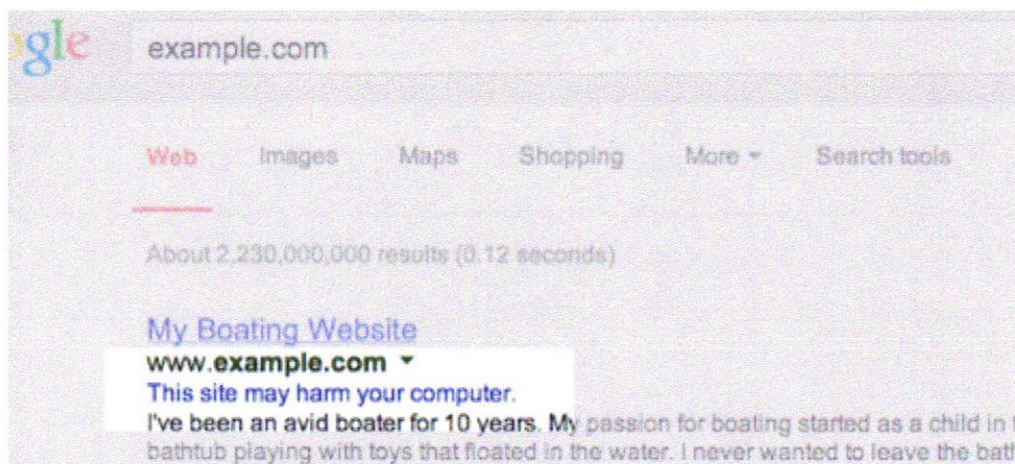
1. A hacked website
2. Links that don't actually hurt you
3. Someone building links because they want to "help you"

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Let's evaluate these one-by-one so you can learn how to rule them out.

Identifying a Hacked Site

If your site has disappeared from the search engine rankings, and you've been noticing some suspicious links lately, your first reaction may be to say "someone came after me!" However, the truth may actually be that you are suffering from a completely different kind of penalty altogether.



Truthfully, those links may have nothing to do with your site having problems. The real issue may be that your site has been hacked, and has been removed from search engine results so that it does not unintentionally harm others or infect other websites.

You can confirm this for yourself by checking Webmaster Tools for a message about hacking, spam, or malware. [Google has a help page here that offers information on hacking](#), as well as information to help you remove any malicious files and request a review of your site.

Non-Harmful Links

As we already mentioned earlier, strange links from sites you aren't familiar with are a regular part of the Internet. If these links don't use spammy anchor text or link to you thousands of times, they really offer no cause for concern. You may think they're harming you, but they're probably being ignored by Google as it is.

If you really don't feel comfortable allowing these links to stick around—that is, if you're worried they could become harmful in the future, or are concerned they might be causing issues already—you can disavow them. [Google has information on disavowing links on this page](#). However, use caution: disavowing links that are helping you rank can cause big problems for you, and may even cause severe damage to your visibility and traffic.

DISAVOWED LINK:

When publishers tell Google they don't want certain links to be considered toward their ranking.



Someone Building Links to “Help” You

This particular occurrence happens more often than the other two, generally speaking, and is usually what leads to businesses thinking they are being attacked by their competitors. When they receive a penalty, and find a large number of bad links pointing to their website, they may be quick to say “we didn't ask for these!”

However... they may have. Unfortunately, in many cases, SEO agencies, employees, and even well-meaning friends and family members will build or buy links because they think it will help boost a website's ranking with no consequences. They don't realize that these links will ultimately be harmful. Because the business isn't always aware of this, it can take a while for the truth to come to light.

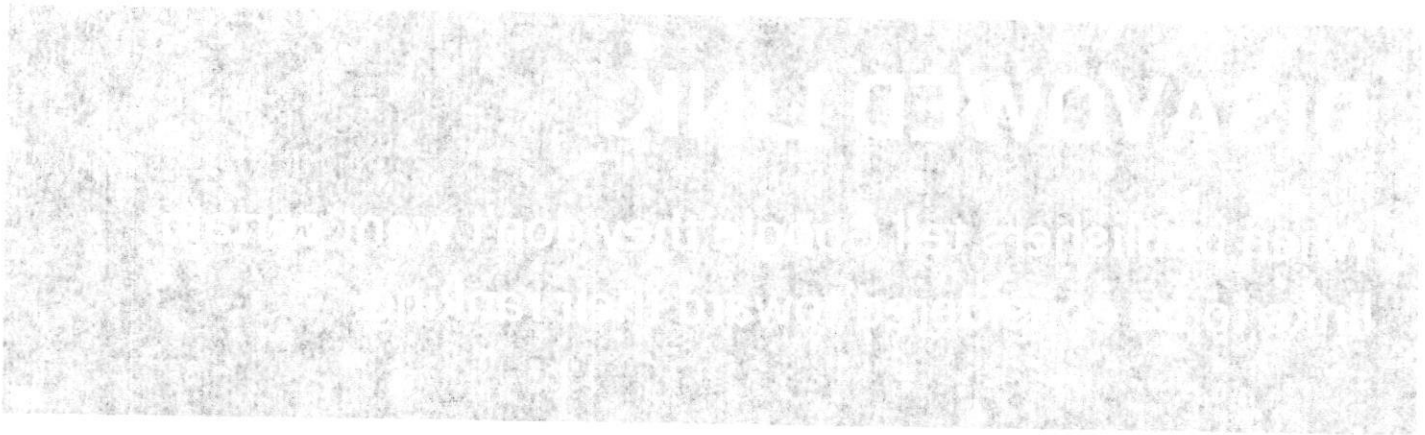
Truthfully, those who may have noticed the link have noticed it because it was a link to a page that has been removed from the internet. The link was a link to a page that has been removed from the internet. The link was a link to a page that has been removed from the internet.

You can contact the link by clicking on the link. The link is a link to a page that has been removed from the internet. The link is a link to a page that has been removed from the internet. The link is a link to a page that has been removed from the internet.

The Helpful Link

We are already receiving a lot of feedback from our readers. We are already receiving a lot of feedback from our readers. We are already receiving a lot of feedback from our readers. We are already receiving a lot of feedback from our readers.

If you really don't feel comfortable allowing these links to be used, you can always remove them. If you really don't feel comfortable allowing these links to be used, you can always remove them. If you really don't feel comfortable allowing these links to be used, you can always remove them.



Someone Building Links to Help You

This particular occurrence happens more often than the other two. This particular occurrence happens more often than the other two. This particular occurrence happens more often than the other two.

However, they may have a different story. However, they may have a different story. However, they may have a different story. However, they may have a different story.

There's a lesson to be learned here: before allowing anyone to build links for you, always ask what methods they will use. If their answer promises quick results at a very low cost, run in the other direction.

"We measure our success by how much we WOW our clients."



See how we can help you

Grow Your Business

Enter your website to get started now

[888-256-9448](tel:888-256-9448)

Identifying a True Case of Negative SEO

Identifying a real, valid case of negative search engine optimization can be tricky. However, if the three scenarios above have been completely ruled out, the website in question has received a penalty or is ranking extremely poorly, and no other cause can be found for an influx of bad links, you may be looking at a true case of negative SEO.

Rather than spend time wondering "why?" or "how?" at this stage, you should prepare to invest all of your time and resources in recovering from the attack on your site. This is the only way you can recover your Google rankings and get your traffic back.

How Can I Recover from a Negative SEO Attack?

Steps to recover from a negative SEO attack:

1. Identify the harmful links
2. Ask for the links to be removed
3. Create and upload a disavow file
4. If penalized, submit a reconsideration request

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Identify the Harmful Links

Your first step will be to identify the links that are harming your site. If you've been penalized, or are really under attack, chances are good that there will be hundreds of links... if not thousands... pointing at your site that you want to remove.

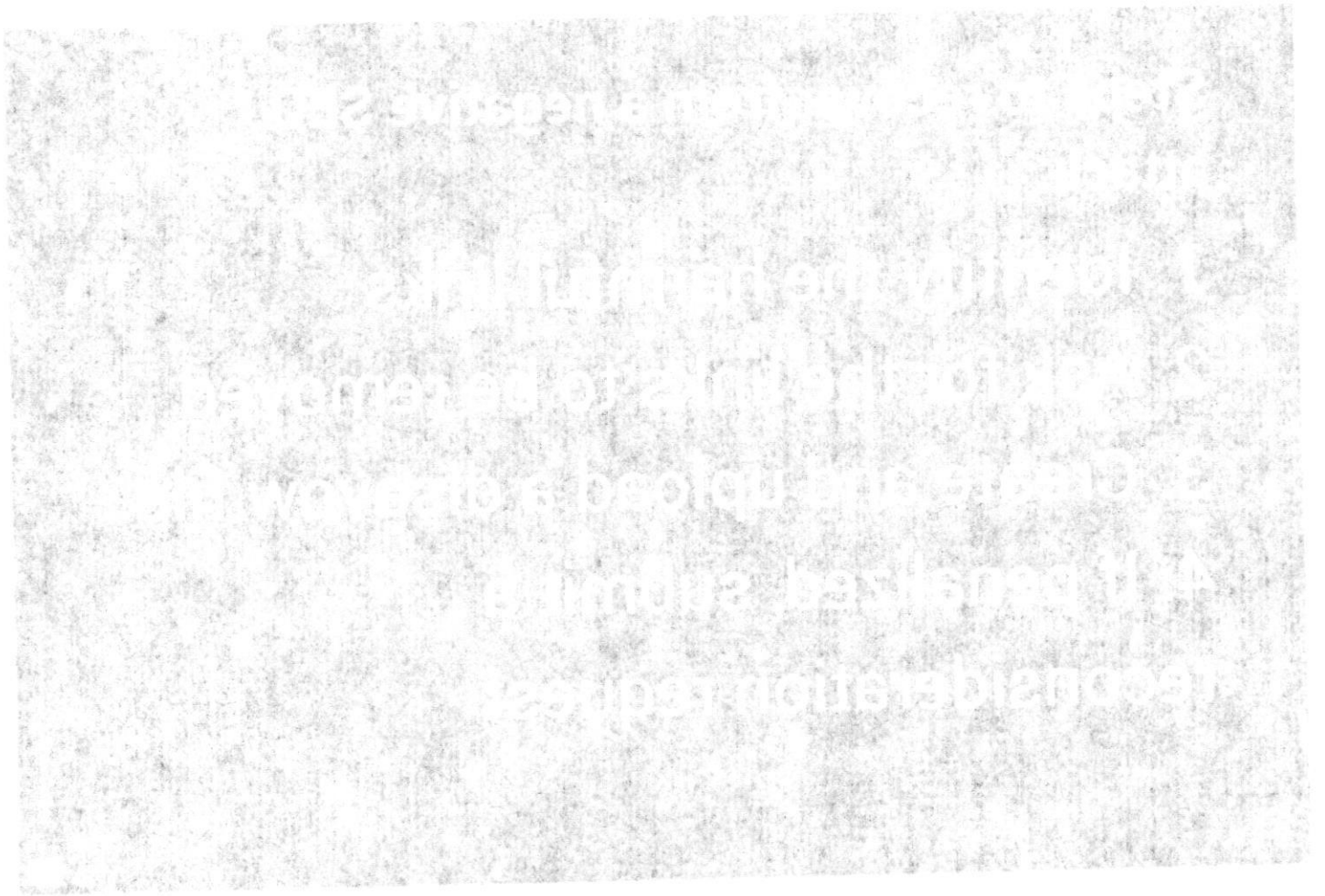
There are a variety of link audit tools that you can use to perform this step, or you can review your incoming links in Webmaster Tools to manually identify the links that you'd like to keep or remove.

Ask for the Links to Be Removed

The first thing that Google will recommend you do is ask for any links to be removed. Even in the case of intentional bad links placed on websites by competitors or malicious parties, you may have a chance to get them taken down just by asking.

Send polite emails to the sites where you have found these links, asking for the links to be removed (or at the very least, changed to nofollow, which means they have no weight). Your email should contain the following:

- Your name, position, and contact information
- The page(s) where you found the link(s) you want removed
- A deadline for the removal



Identify the harmful links

Now that you've identified the harmful links, it's time to remove them. If you have a large number of links, it's best to remove them in batches. This way, you can keep track of the links you've removed and ensure that you haven't removed any good links.

There are a variety of link audit tools that you can use to perform this step. One tool you can use is the Webmaster Tools. This tool is designed to help you identify and remove harmful links from your website.

Ask for the links to be removed

The next thing that Google will recommend you do is ask for the links to be removed. Even if the links are not harmful, it's best to ask for them to be removed. This way, you can ensure that your website is clean and free of any potential issues.

Google will provide you with a list of links that it has identified as harmful. You can then contact the webmaster of the website and ask them to remove the links. If you are unable to contact the webmaster, you can remove the links yourself.

- You can also use the Google Search Console to identify and remove harmful links.
- The Google Search Console will provide you with a list of links that it has identified as harmful. You can then contact the webmaster of the website and ask them to remove the links.
- If you are unable to contact the webmaster, you can remove the links yourself.

Log your activity on a spreadsheet so that you can keep track of who you have contacted, when, and what kind of response you received. This spreadsheet will also help you create a disavow file, which we'll cover in the next step.

If you're asked to pay to remove a link, or met with any kind of refusal or threat, don't worry about it: any links that aren't removed can be disavowed, which is Google's way of removing their power. Just set a deadline by which you'll take action on any links that haven't been manually removed and stick to it.

Create and Upload a Disavow File

If you reach the deadline you set on the links you asked to be taken down, and you still have links left over, you'll need to move on to creating a disavow file. Google allows website owners to disavow links—that is, effectively strip links of their power—but warns that disavowing can be harmful to websites if used inappropriately.



```
# example.com removed most links, but missed these
http://spam.example.com/stuff/comments.html
http://spam.example.com/stuff/paid-links.html
# Contacted owner of shadyseo.com on 7/1/2012 to
# ask for link removal but got no response
domain:shadyseo.com
```

Only disavow links that you are absolutely certain are hurting your website. A thousand links from a spammy gambling website are fine to disavow. However, a link or two from a blog in a different industry aren't necessarily hurting you, even if they look strange. You should focus on taking care of the ones that are clearly suspicious or placed with malicious intent. A link to your site with the anchor text "[brand name] handbag" from a gambling site is malicious and probably designed to hurt you. A link with the text "read this," not so much.

Export the list of links that haven't been removed from your spreadsheet. You'll need to create a text file containing the list of links (or full domains) you want to disavow, then upload it in Webmaster Tools. Google has a page on disavowing links to your site with detailed instructions on creating and submitting this file [right here](#).

If Penalized, Submit a Reconsideration Request

It will take time for Google to process the links in your disavow file. Once this has been completed, however, you should be ready to proceed with the final step in your recovery process.

Many times, website owners only find out they are dealing with negative SEO, or are the recipient of bad links from a competitor, only when they receive a manual action (or penalty) from Google. If you received an unnatural links penalty as part of a negative SEO attack, you will need to submit a reconsideration

request to get back into the search engine results.

Requesting reconsideration of:

http://

Reconsideration statement

☒ By submitting this request, I acknowledge that:

- I have read and understand Google's quality guidelines. [More information](#).
- This site does not currently violate Google's quality guidelines.
- I agree to abide by Google's quality guidelines in the future.

Tell us more about what happened: what actions might have led to any penalties, and what corrective actions have been taken. If you used a search engine optimization (SEO) company, please note that. Describing the SEO firm and their actions is a helpful indication of good faith that may assist in evaluation of reconsideration requests. If you recently acquired this domain and think it may have violated the guidelines before you owned it, let us know that below. In general, sites that directly profit from traffic (e.g. search engine optimizers, affiliate programs, etc.) may need to provide more evidence of good faith before a site will be reconsidered.



[Request reconsideration](#)

Have you seen spam in Google's index? We want to hear about it. Please feel free to submit a [spam report](#)

Google has a helpful video and page detailing how to [request reconsideration of your site](#), or you can refer to [the reconsideration request section](#) of our penalty recovery guide for additional step-by-step help.

Need More Help Dealing with Negative SEO?

Whether you're not sure you're dealing with a negative SEO attack, are struggling with an unnatural links penalty, or are just looking for a reliable partner to help with your search engine optimization efforts, WebFX can help. As a leading SEO agency, we can identify any problems with your site, no matter what the source, and correct them, improving your ranking and boosting your traffic.

If you need help, don't hesitate to reach out to one of our expert web strategists. We would love to find out what we can do to make your website better. Feel free to call or email us at any time!

Need help with your website's SEO? Call 888-256-9448 or [contact us](#) online today to get in touch with an SEO professional at WebFX, the nation's leading search engine optimization agency.

Spam backlinks can also lead to a [Google Penguin penalty](#), which can affect your website's traffic *big time*.

In terms of specific SEO metrics, spam backlinks will likely have one or more of the following characteristics:

- Low Domain Authority
- Low Trust Flow
- Low Citation Flow
- Low MozRank
- High Spam Score
- 100+ outbound links (on one single page)
- Domain not indexed by Google

For example, here's how a spam backlink is evaluated in the Monitor Backlinks tool.

Keep reading to learn how Monitor Backlinks can help you clean up your spam backlinks—it's going to make this whole process so much easier.

For now, you might still be wondering how you got into this situation in the first place. Why all the spam?

Where Do Spam Backlinks Come From?

There are a variety of reasons why your website may have spam backlinks.

Some SEO services will purchase spammy backlinks to give their clients a sudden boost in ranking. They might do this out of laziness—or they simply aren't up-to-date on current industry practices and webmaster guidelines.

So, if you've [hired an SEO](#) recently, they may actually be behind the spam.

The links might also come from webmasters who don't realize they're hurting you by linking to your site from theirs. They're just thinking about improving their own site quality (but they've hurt you in the process).

Alternatively, some competitors engage in [negative SEO campaigns](#), which often include a barrage of spam backlinks that damage their competitor SERP rankings (if they don't [have Monitor Backlinks to protect them](#), that is).

No matter how you end up with spam links, the main differentiator between a good backlink and a spam

backlink is the quality of website from which it links.

If you're reviewing your backlinks manually, here are a few common [types of spam backlinks](#) to watch out for:

1. Spam links from link directories

Link directories are websites that have no purpose other than to link to *other* sites.

They have no coherent theme, no other content and no design.

A link directory is also most likely a standalone site with no backlinks leading to it.

2. Spam links from bot comments on blogs and websites

If you've ever managed a WordPress blog, you may have seen comments come through that have generic messages like "Great article!" paired with a long URL.

These are most likely comment spambots, and some can be intelligent enough to mention the article title or the author name.

Don't overlook these, though. Comment spam backlinks are bad for your SEO.

3. Links with over-optimized anchor text

Most backlinks link to websites (through anchor text) using the site's name (e.g., Monitor Backlinks), an article title or perhaps a specific URL.

But if your backlinks repeat the same keyword over and over in the anchor text, such as "the best SEO tool," Google will most likely pick up on the pattern as it looks very suspicious and intentional.

4. Links from sites with duplicate text

Why do you think that blogs and websites work so hard to publish a variety of unique and useful content?

Not only do readers appreciate the value provided by the content, but Google also encourages sites to do so.

The Google ranking algorithm devalues websites that produce low quality, duplicated content.

5. Links from foreign or irrelevant sites

If you think that Google isn't quite smart enough to measure the relevancy of backlinks, you're underestimating their algorithm.

Relevancy is very important when building backlinks.

If your website about beauty products is in English, and thousands of your backlinks are from Russian-language sites selling car parts, Google will recognize this and penalize you.

Now that you know what spam backlinks look like, let's target and remove them. There are a few ways you can [clean up your bad backlinks](#).

1. Sniff out the spam.

If you suffer from negative SEO or bad backlinks, cleaning up is quite the hassle—and it all starts with *finding* the spam.

Thankfully, a tool like [Monitor Backlinks](#) can make it much easier, *and* it can keep your site healthy by proactively preventing spam backlinks.

First things first, you can pull up a report of all your existing backlinks and review key metrics that indicate spam.

Look for the warning signs we noted above: high Spam Score, low Trust Flow, links not indexed by Google and so on. [Click here for a full guide to identifying spam link with the Monitor Backlinks tool](#).

And that's just to get started.

When you put a tool like Monitor Backlinks to work against spam backlinks, you'll get proactively notified of new links to your website and can easily identify those that are harmful or toxic.

[Your backlink dashboard](#) will always give you an up-to-date snapshot of your link activity and quality.

2. Contact the webmaster of the website.

Use a tool like [Whois](#) to identify the owner of the domain (or [WhoIsHostingThis](#) to find the website host), and reach out to them.

Ask politely.

Most of the time, though, webmasters may ask for payment or refuse to take down the link.

Don't be surprised if this happens to you, but don't skip this step! It's by far the most straightforward method of removing spam backlinks, even if its success rate is low.

3. Downgrade the pages with bad backlinks ([404/410](#)).

Too many 404 ERROR pages can also send a negative message to Google, but if you can't get the link

removed, revert the page to a 404/410. This will at least lessen the blow from the spam backlink.

4. Trash that URL and start over.

If you're facing an abundance of spam backlinks that are taking over your website ranking, it may be time to abandon ship and start clean.

The pages that have been inundated with bad backlinks might need the redirect treatment—or you might just want to change the URL or create a new page entirely.

Obviously, this should be your very, very last resort, though, as communicating a new URL to your followers and customers can be a hassle, and this will wipe out any good backlinks too.

5. The most effective strategy: Disavow!

Google's Disavow Links tool is a godsend for webmasters everywhere. This tool basically tells Google that you don't recognize a link and don't want to be held responsible for it.

According to [Google](#):

If you've done as much work as you can to remove spammy or low-quality links from the web, and are unable to make further progress in getting the links taken down, you can disavow the remaining links. In other words, you can ask Google not to take certain links into account when assessing your site.

The hardest part of [using Google's Disavow Links tool](#) is making a list of the spam backlinks.

To collect a list of these backlinks, let [Monitor Backlinks](#) do the work for you.

It equips you to disavow links with a few clicks of a button.

Once you've filtered for spam backlinks, you can download a .TXT file with one [bad backlink](#) per line directly from the tool. It's perfectly formatted for disavowing purposes, so you'll be all set to go.

When your list is complete and downloaded, head to [Google's Disavow Links](#) tool, choose your domain and follow the steps. When prompted, you'll upload your file, click *Submit* and that's it!

Monitor Backlinks will keep track of what you've disavowed, too.

You'll get a confirmation email after you've completed the process, and changes should be reflected on your site within two to four weeks. Not that you'll need to watch out for emails—Monitor Backlinks will automatically let you know when changes are made to your backlinks.

For a complete rundown of the process, watch this walkthrough video:

