

# How Google's Algorithm Has Changed SEO and Why That's a Good Thing: A Guide to the Algorithm Menagerie for Pharma Marketers



Since Google's inception, its goal has been to provide visitors with the most relevant website content, best answering questions posed or queries searched. While most SEO professionals and business owners have respected the power of Google's search engine and worked to create content that solves problems and answers questions, a few bad apples worked to manipulate the Google algorithm. Professional "black hat SEOs" gained an understanding of the nearly 200 factors that are used to rank each website and developed processes to cheat the system. Subsequently, this led Google to begin working on refinements, or algorithm updates, that helped protect the value and trustworthiness of the results that Google would display to its visitors. After all, if visitors to Google.com lost their trust in their search results, why would they continue to choose Google for future queries?

## Evolution of the Algorithm

Google first began working on updating its algorithm around 2002. As with any small company (Google's IPO didn't come until two years later), Google hadn't mastered how these updates would work in the future but knew something needed to be done.

When Google began this practice, their algorithm changes were infrequent and were much more reactive than proactive. Its first unnamed update didn't sit very well with SEOs. It wasn't until 2010 that Google's algorithm began refreshing more consistently with a more proactive focus on their long term goal of high quality results.

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The release of "Caffeine" allowed Google to update results in a more streamlined and consistent manner. Since then, Google has issued numerous updates to continue refreshing their rankings with the highest quality sites across the Internet. The three most notable updates are Panda, Penguin, and Hummingbird.

Despite the endearing animal counterparts chosen to represent the updates, these algorithms redefined the practice of SEO. By building on one another, the algorithm updates redefined the way search engines crawl websites and how we look at best practices today. It's important to note that each algorithm update does not 'replace' the one before – Hummingbird did not replace Penguin, for example – instead they became building blocks on top of each other and each continues to be a relevant part of the Google algorithm.

## The Introduction of Panda

February 2010 was a tumultuous month in the SEO community and businesses alike. The very public penalties of [J.C. Penney](#) and [Overstock.com](#) set the stage for Google's Panda update late in the month.

SEO is meant to rank websites based on their ability to provide relevant content and be viewed as authoritative by the links driving back to them. The introduction of Panda looked to clean up search results displaying low quality content. Panda focuses on eliminating content from search results that either doesn't provide value to searchers or is duplicate content. Primarily, the types of websites it affected includes:

- [Content farms](#)
- Websites with little content to offer
- Sites with high ad to content ratios
- Sites that focus more on SEO rankings than valuable content

Updates and refreshes to the algorithm have been a learning experience for both Google and SEOs. One of the latest updates, made in May 2014, takes a more critical stance on press release and other public relations websites. As new tactics begin driving falsely representative rankings, even these legitimate ways of building keyword relevance have come under scrutiny.

## What Pharma Marketers Should

**Know:** Want to succeed in post Panda pharma world? Produce detailed content on each webpage that answers the questions people are searching for.

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## Google's Penguin Update

Penguin was developed to address the misrepresentation of authority being passed through low quality links. Since its initial release in 2012, Penguin has gone after websites misusing links to artificially boost rankings for anyone willing to pay or “spam” their way to the top of Google's rankings.

It changed the way SEOs looked at links; shifting the emphasis to quality of links and away from the unnatural quantity of links that had been driving rankings for far too long.

While linking is primarily an outbound tactic, meaning it focuses on connecting two sites through a link, internal anchor text driving between two pages on a website can also be manipulated to boost rankings. A good example of this is a website that unnaturally anchors keywords that a) don't fit into the flow of a sentence or b) are duplicative for no purpose other than the ranking they can drive.

## What Pharma Marketers Should

**Know:** This is probably not the best time to start writing separate webpages for brand keywords, such as “dose,” “doses,” “dosing” and “dosage.” Instead, build pages that provide value and answer questions, link from highly reputable websites with your own unique content and engage with your audience through social media so they will do the linking for you.

## Hummingbird Overhauls the Search Landscape

Hummingbird is arguably the most important algorithm update, as it looks at how queries are interpreted. In this update, Google's emphasis shifted toward the **context** of a search. Up to this point, even the complexity of the Google algorithm was somewhat hindered by the number of instances that a keyword or keyword phrase appeared on a website, blog, or social properties.

Hummingbird looks to dive deeper, attempting to understand the relationship of keywords to the overall content and to understand how a piece of content would potentially answer the question posed by a query.

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Hummingbird places a more predominant emphasis on proper utilization of schema tagging to provide search context. It also focuses on social media as a method for understanding how actual people are posing questions and answers them using the most relevant content available online. In addition, it provides rationale for pharma brands to leverage alternate forms of content, such as blogs, to answer the questions that a high level webpage simply cannot delve into. You might ask how your website would rank in a Hummingbird world. I might respond by telling you that you are asking the wrong question – the question to ask is “what is your content strategy?”

## What Pharma Marketers Should

**Know:** It is time to stop thinking about only your website and start devising an all-encompassing content strategy that includes social media and blogging as tentacles of brand messaging, used to further the brand's reach and engage an online community. Google desires content that addresses the precise questions of its searchers and in an ever evolving digital landscape, the focus has shifted toward creating a holistic brand experience rooted in addressing a customer's needs at every point throughout their online journey.

## What Does This All Mean for Pharma Brands?

Pharma marketers who get search savvy in terms of how Google's changes affect the industry will lead the branding pack. Google has made it very clear that they expect us to "market ethically" if we are going to utilize their search engine as a form of brand promotion – and "market ethically" has everything to do with knowing how to play the game. Hummingbird placed a much larger emphasis on schema tagging to add context to content. Social media is a must in the Hummingbird landscape, both for answering the questions searchers want to know and for building valuable links that searchers are telling you they want.

Finally, realize that a website doesn't have to answer every question and that it probably never will. [Utilize keyword research and social listening](#) to know what consumers and HCPs are asking and respond to them with fresh content via a blog or social media. An overwhelming site is one that disrupts the logical thought process of a user and instead denies a user access to discovering more about a brand or answering questions they are seeking answers to. Instead, help your audiences find exactly what they're looking for.



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