

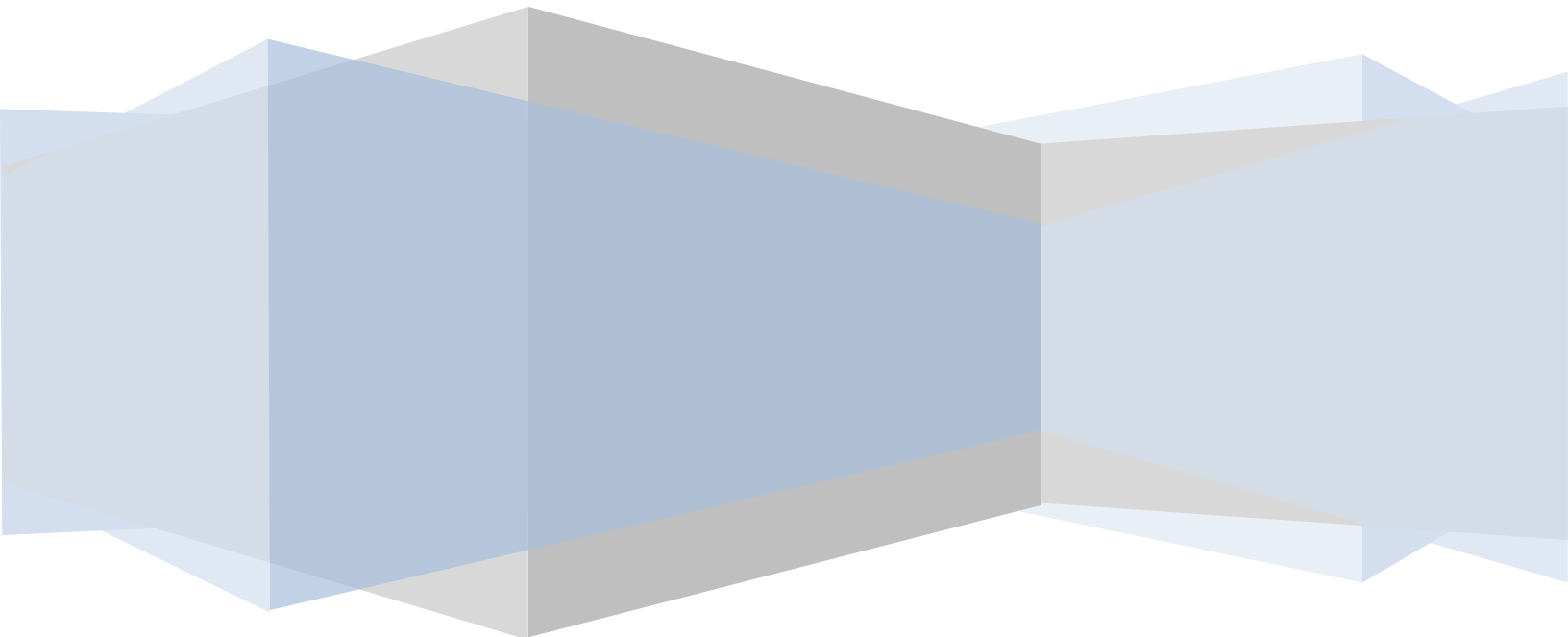
Written by Aji Issac when he was heading DA web warkting team

“What happens if Google vanishes tomorrow?” – A warning sign for clients

Be web business educated

[Weekly Educative series – X]

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Search engine rankings are undoubtedly a major source of traffic but dependence on search engine ranking is a very risky business move. Business ABC (a friend of mine) invested good amount of money in SEO/SEM. His website became top in Search engines for all major keyphrases and he was on top of the world. Money was flowing like a flooded river (with a conversion ratio of close to 5% and for some keyphrases even 10%-15%). In the earlier stages he was selling the leads for a minimum amount. After the flow in traffic and sales, he opened his own branch to process the leads. Many telesales people were recruited, new applications were brought and head of finance joined the team. Their site became a good example for any SEO firm's success. But one fine day, things changed and the spoiler was none other Google, the most close business friend by now. **Google did not vanish away but it changed some algorithm** and ABC.com site went down (**as down as hell**) and it was nowhere to find. The reasons could be many but a well established business with a large team was left with no work. They did not know what to do. There started frustration, firing of employees and financial trouble. Were employees responsible for this down fall? No, they weren't. The business owner somehow put all his eggs in one **unreliable basket, the basket of search engine traffic**.

Search Engine ranking and Search Engine traffic can be very much unreliable (at times atleast). One must always build a business independent of SE ranks. It is a warning sign if your business is completely focused and dependent on Search Engine Traffic.

Florida update – Google Hijacked

Nov 2003, it was my early days in Web marketing. I was taking some of the new sites to top rankings. I was happy with the progress and all of sudden some upcoming sites were thrown out of Google. I was surprise and I felt guilty of hitting some OOPs (Over Optimization Penalties). [While browsing WMW](#), I met many others with similar stories (**They started calling it Florida update**). Some were happy and some were sad, both happiness and sadness were extreme. This was a major change in Google's algorithm. For many it was as if **Google was hijacked**. Those were just an example of extreme updates. Matt Cutts of Google have explained the update in some details at <http://www.mattcutts.com/blog/whats-an-update/> (See the related links as well). There are many more updates like this with very odd names. [Brett of WMW can explain the naming conventions to these updates](#).

I forgot to mention **that December followed November in 2003, the Christmas season**, Season of heavy sales. People who lost their rankings did lose more than just rankings. I don't want to scare you off by mentioning their losses but just want you to know some unexpected possibilities with promising search engine traffic.



Will there be another sleepless Florida Update for you?

I wish you don't have to go through those phases but I am afraid to guarantee you that. Some SEO firms may be leading you to the dead end road of success but there are many who learned their lessons after few updates. Even being the best doesn't guarantee you a top position all the time. There can be temporary downs for strong sites as well. I have worked for many sites that have shown consistent ranking for last 4 to 5 years (*In top 3 most of the time*). Let me take one such site as an example. It was a quality site. We put all our efforts in making it really the best, not only for the search engines but also for the users. We used to get hundreds of REAL testimonials every month effortlessly. Even such a website had to face some down falls (it was very temporary), people called it [position #6 penalty](#).

Did I make my point that it is advisable to be prepared for some temporary downfalls? Let me rephrase it. Did I make my point that it is advisable to look for alternatives and be prepared with backup strategies for search engine traffic proactively?

5 Backup strategies for search engine traffic

These are some of the backup plans for search engine traffic (I am trying to put it in a priority order, most useful ones at top). There can be many more strategies.

1. **Buy out leads:** Keep this option open. If you process leads (by offering services or selling products) then it is a good practice to stay in touch with lead sellers. Know the cost and the process before hand to use this option in times of dry traffic. Even if you are not processing the leads, your lead buyer will always respect you for a consistent lead supplier as the lead buyer allocate resource to process your leads. I have seen people buying the leads and selling it almost the same amount to keep their brand value as a consistent lead provider. There are many places where you can find the lead sellers. [Commission junction](#) is one such platform.
2. **Run affiliate programs:** This may look like buying out leads (as in option 1) but affiliate programs can be wider than that. It can be based on traffic, leads or sales. You may make partnerships with many websites to participate in your affiliate programs. In affiliate partnership model, you pay a share of profit to the affiliate site. Example, in mortgage industry you will have to pay \$.05 - \$2 for getting a visitor, \$5 - \$25 for a lead and \$60 - \$500 for a sale. For affiliate sales, the margin of profit will be lesser than that of a search engine but works out to be more stable than Googles and Yahoos. There is very little chance that all of your affiliate members will fail to deliver at the same time. Be careful of large affiliate members as you may end up becoming too much depended on them. To be on a safer side consider selling some unexpected leads. Online advertisement can also be considered as one form of affiliate program, where you are pay a fixed monthly, CPM (for 1000 impressions), CPC (per click) or CPA (per action).

3. **Community:** This is not really a short term replacement for search engine traffic but it works out really well in long term. We have seen many communities surviving the tides of search engine updates. People visit your website to participate and they refer more people to the website. Just imagine a scenario when a community has 10,000 daily returning visitors, even if 10% of them refers a new person a day then you can expect 1000 new visitors every single day irrespective of your search engine ranking and traffic.
4. **Reciprocal relevant link exchange:** This can ensure additional traffic. Example, if you offer services in Texas only then you can make partnership with similar players who don't offer services in Texas. This way your partner will get traffic for other cities and you for Texas.
5. **Social Media:** There can be more online presence for your company than just your website. Improve your participation in social media websites.

How to diversify the risk?

Along with finding alternatives to search engine traffic, you can diversify the risk for search engine traffic. In my last 5 years, I have noticed that most of the time only the major terms/keyphrases are hit the most with algorithm updates. Invest on many small keyphrases (the long tail part of it) but also invest in many major keyphrases (Just not focus only on one or two major keyphrases). In other words, to diversify search engine traffic risk:

- Invest on more than 5 major keyphrases.
- Invest on long tail of smaller keyphrases.



Quick note for clients

We advise the clients to check following things to build a better online business model:

1. How search engine independent is your business? What will happen if the search engine rankings go down?
2. How is your investment strategy for keyphrases? Are you investing on more than 5 major keyphrases and many small keyphrases?
3. Are you checking your web marketing firm's strategy on investment?
4. Do you have affiliate marketing? Is it supported by good application?
5. Do you know where you can buy leads? It's associated cost and the process?
6. Do you where you can sell leads? It's associated cost and the process?
7. Are you building a community feeling around your web business?
8. Are you focused on getting listed in major social media websites? Are you focused on getting listed to top directories? Are you searching for relevant partners to exchange traffic?

Special Note for this week:

Did you get the access to your client service area? We are empowering our clients to do self SEO or collective SEO. Get access to the client service area and keep an eye on every activity. Also client service area will allow you to participate in all marketing areas. We have launched:

- Clustering section
- Pages section
- Access details section
- Website analysis section

By next week we will be launching the Accounting module for better accountability.

