
Google's New Link Filter

by **Wayne Hurlbert** | Contributing Writer | 2005-04-07

New incoming links are much sought after by every website owner and blogger. It's generally agreed that having abundant relevant incoming links provide a boost to a site's search rankings. Conventional search engine optimization wisdom, coupled with experience with incoming link power, would seem to bear out that fact.

A Close Look At Google's Link Filter

Editor's Note: *In today's issue, Wayne gives a thorough analysis of Google's Link Filter. Have any of you had any experiences you'd like to share about dealing with this process? Discuss at [WebProWorld](#).*

Search engines, led by link obsessed Google, value incoming links very highly, at least so we think. Some search engine optimization experts have started to place some very important caveats on the incoming link power theory.

Instead of automatically assuming the more incoming links the better, other factors may have come into play. The constant evolution of search engine algorithms, they say, may have morphed past the value of incoming links.

The dissenters from the link power concept believe, as do most modern SEO professionals, that link relevance is very important. As a victory of quality over quantity, that idea makes good logical sense.

There are other ideas that have also cast some doubt on the value of links, including a dampening filter on new incoming links, as part of the latest Google algorithm and patent application.

The thought that Google may be employing a dampening filter on new incoming links is not new. The idea has been given serious consideration, especially as part of the "sandbox theory" discussions. Advocates of the new link filter theory believe that Google does not give immediate full credit for an incoming link.

The theory says that Google provides a partial immediate credit, by running new links through a dampening filter. Only as the link ages, and remains linked to the site for a given period of time, does the full value of the Google PageRank and the link popularity receive its complete credit level.

That total link value and PageRank credit, is also measured for link theme relevance, making the process of link building much more difficult than in the past.

What the theory contends, in short, is new links don't provide immediate benefit to the receiving website. The link popularity and Google PageRank benefit is not passed in its entirety, from the date of discovery and indexing of a new link. In effect, the theory postulates the existence of a [Sandbox](#) for new links.

Much like the [Google Sandbox theory](#) itself, there is evidence in support of this dampening effect theory. Also like the sandbox theory, there is evidence that the phenomenon doesn't exist, or is simply one of mistaken identity.

As with all potential filters, their possible existence must be taken seriously. If there is indeed a filter in place to dampen the value of new links, steps must be taken to reduce or eliminate its effect. If there is no such dampening filter, the same sound practices will provide additional benefits as part of a well designed link building program.

Evidence of a link value filter

The question must be considered as to whether or not a fresh link dampening filter has been established as an ongoing and permanent part of the Google algorithm. If such a filter exists longer term, it could have far reaching effects on the SEO efforts of most website owners. In fact, a loss of link value kicks out one of the most important legs of the optimization stool.

Since many SEO professionals consider links to be the most important factor in the Google algorithm, there is certainly a need to examine the evidence for or against a new link filter. Should such a link dampening filter exist, a radical rethinking of SEO strategy would have to take place. There is definitely much at stake.

Many website owners have added new incoming links to their sites, but have not received a corresponding boost in the search engine rankings as a result. Conventional SEO wisdom holds that additional incoming links will enhance the any site's placement in the search engine results pages (SERPs) for the targeted keyword phrase.

Some webmasters and SEO experts no longer believe that link boost to be the normal course of events. In fact, some experts believe almost the opposite, that the new links are dampened by a filter, and could even cause a temporary drop or hold in the SERPs. Reports also are circulating that Google PageRank is not being fully passed along from new links either.

The question arises as to what would motivate Google to introduce a fresh link filter. It would appear to be a similar goal to the alleged sandbox filter for new websites. If a site adds many new links, in a very short period of time, it's thought that Google might consider those links to be artificial.

The links might either be purchased, the result of cross linking several related sites, or perhaps part of a linking scheme such as a link farm. In other words, Google wants to make sure the links are natural, as opposed to existing only for the purposes of boosting PageRank and SERPs placements.

In order to prevent any artificial link popularity, the theory proposes that Google dampens the value of all new links until their relevance is determined.

Google's possible purpose for filtering new links

While Google's algorithm is not made public, it's generally thought that Google intends to clamp down on link sales for PageRank and for ranking in the SERPs. Also on Google's hit list are multiple interlinked sites, existing on the same ip c block, entirely for the purposes of link popularity and PageRank enhancement.

Purchased links tend to be added to a website in medium to large quantities, and often all at one time. Large quantities of incoming links, appearing all at once, might indeed trip a filter.

Google could suspect a high volume of links added at one time to be purchased, and therefore suspect. The possibility would be in keeping with Google's strongly suspected policy of discouraging link sales. After all, Google's guidelines point out that any type of linking schemes are against its policies.

The ip c block is the third series of numbers in the identity of an ISP. For example, in 123.123.xxx.12 the c block is denoted as xxx. Google is able to readily identify those links.

A dampening filter is not only used on such linking schemes, but a penalty filter as well. They are not the type of links that are part of the possible link dampening filter. The alleged link dampening filter is supposedly placing new incoming links in a version of the sandbox.

Google intends links to occur naturally, and with that in mind, their algorithm is apparently designed to reward natural relevant links. Google doesn't consider purchased links, or interlinked sites to be natural, and has provided some indication that they are devaluing them. In the case of interlinked sites, Google is even penalizing sites in much the same way that link farms are given penalties.

By dampening the value of new incoming links, Google probably hopes to discourage link sales in particular. By lessening their value, and removing any immediate link boost, Google might reason that website owners will be less inclined to buy incoming links. The problem lies with the possibility that all incoming links, including natural and relevant ones, are being filtered along with the purchased and non-theme related links.

Google's intention might be to similar to the alleged sandbox dampening filter for new websites. In both cases, the concern on the part of Google is non-natural links simply to boost PageRank and SERPs positioning. By filtering links, and determining their long term staying power, Google appears to doling out the link benefits over time.

Avoiding the filter, whether it exists or not

No one can say with any certainty that any new link dampening filter actually exists. The evidence for such a filter is based on information contained in the Google patent application, and may not reflect the overall Google search algorithm, or Google's intentions, now or for the future.

There is a possibility that a new link dampening filter might not exist, or might only affect certain site themes. As to its real motives, Google isn't talking beyond what is already made public.

In any case, there are ways to prevent most new links from being dampened. Instead of worrying about new link filters, develop a sound linking policy, and any potential problems shouldn't affect the vast majority of websites. A good linking program will bypass most, if not all possible filters, real or imagined.

A linking strategy should concentrate on developing natural incoming theme relevant links as its ultimate objective. While that goal is a bit idealistic for many website owners, it certainly has the potential to avoid any filters.

By providing precisely the type of link Google prefers, it is far less likely to trigger any dampeners, if at all. Because they are added gradually over time, relevant natural links are highly unlikely to be sandboxed.

To receive this type of natural incoming link, strong theme relevant content must be developed for the website. Good informative content for website visitors attracts links. The problem is that natural linking is a slow process, and the real world SERPs need faster attention.

Add one way directory links. Google's spider crawls the major, and even minor directories, on a very frequent basis. Categorized directory links, especially from human edited directories, are very relevant and theme oriented.

As incoming links, they are far less likely to be filtered than links from other websites. It's widely thought that a link from the Open Directory Project (DMOZ) provides an almost immediate boost to the indexed website.

Keep link exchange programs confined to theme relevant sites. Avoid exchanges with websites that have little to no topic relation to your site. Entirely non-relevant links are much more likely to be viewed with suspicion by Google, and possibly filtered. We already are quite certain, that Google passes along more PageRank and link popularity boost from theme relevant sites, than from topically unrelated sites.

When making link exchanges, space them out over a period of time. Instead of doing all of the link trades in one week, use a two to three month time frame instead. A longer time lag will give each link a full opportunity to be integrated into the Google system, and avoid being dampened. If a link is going to be dampened, it may as well be delayed.

Conclusion

Many search engine optimization professionals believe that Google has implemented a dampening filter for new incoming links. The alleged filter is thought to depress the link popularity boost and the Google PageRank transfer of newly added links.

Not everyone in the SEO community supports the concept of a fresh link dampening filter. There is really no absolute way to determine whether it exists, one way or the other.

As with the controversial, and somewhat related [Sandbox theory](#), there are techniques to avoid the filter's impact, one way or the other. Fortunately, good SEO practices are the best route for a cautious website owner to use as prevention.

A good relevant theme oriented linking program is the best method to keep any filter to the absolute minimum.

A good linking plan is a great idea at any time; whether a filter on new links exists, or is simply a mirage.

About the Author:

[Wayne Hurlbert](#) provides insightful information about marketing, promotions, search engine optimization and public relations for websites and business blogs on the popular [Blog Business World](#).

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