

## The Impact of Low-Quality Backlinks on SEO

When the topic is SEO secrets or PageRank algorithms, mum's the word from Google -- most of the time. Yet it seems even the king of search engines will unzip its lips with the right amount of coaxing. In an interview with Google's Senior Support Engineer Maile Ohye, Jen Lopez from SEO Moz gained the juicy scoop on two critical topics: do low-quality backlinks influence rankings, and do they incur a risk for penalties?

As Ohye explained, the answer on both accounts is "no." Because poor-quality sites -- such as low-traffic blogs, dummy pages and scrapers -- offer subpar user experience and lack useful content, they typically rank low themselves; as a result, they have little ability to pass PageRank to other sites. Google perceives such backlinks as innocuous annoyances rather than deliberate attempts by site owners to boost rankings. In short, these so-called "spammy" sites are too insignificant to arouse concern. Ohye indicated that Google's own Webmaster Central Blog is frequented by scrapers -- and that it's simply not an issue worth sweating.

When it comes to dispensing penalties, Google has bigger fish to fry. Sites that buy or manipulate backlinks from high PageRank sites are more likely to beep on Google's radar, raise suspicion for "black hat" SEO tactics and earn hefty punishments -- which can range in severity from temporary drops in PageRank to the dreaded grayed-out PageRank bar. Because highly ranked sites dominate search results and reach a greater volume of users, Google keeps a particularly watchful eye on potential SEO spam that involves such sites. When the goal is to instigate far-reaching changes, penalizing spammy backlinks is far from a priority; Google prefers to tackle more salient cases of backlink abuse.

Although low-quality links fail to sway a site's PageRank, they may not be completely irrelevant. Between the lines of Ohye's comments lays a potential option for SEO: backlinks from blogs or scrapers may impart anchor text value, elevating a site's search engine position -- which, when coupled with backlinks from trusted high PageRank sites, can benefit a site's performance. This strategy lacks enough study to be deemed solid, but for SEO companies and webmasters, it may be a tactic worth investigating.

### About the Author

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