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**THREE POTENTIALLY
SITE-SLAUGHTERING
SEO UPDATES
AND HOW TO KEEP
THEM FROM SHELLACKING
YOUR SITE**

WHITE PAPER



Search engine optimization (SEO) can often feel more like art than science. It takes a little bit of planning, a whole lot of hustle, and a sprinkle of magic to make your site pop to the top of search rankings. And with all the behind the scenes algorithms and constant tweaking, it's not always easy to stay ahead of the SEO curve.

One of the great things about WordPress is that it is one of the best content management systems (CMS) for SEO. And there are ways to optimize your WordPress site to take better advantage of SEO and boost your rankings, which will ultimately drive more traffic.

Recently, however, SEO has dominated the tech news headlines, with a trio of major SEO updates that, if you haven't paid close enough attention, could kill your SEO rankings and sink your site to the dreaded abyss of being barely findable by search.

But fret not! There are steps you can take to overcome SEO challenges and watch the search-driven clicks roll in.

Let's take a look at the three recent SEO updates that could affect your traffic and how to ensure your site doesn't suffer.

Mobilegeddon

Like a Texas-sized asteroid screaming toward Earth, "mobilegeddon" was expected to have a catastrophic impact when it made landfall on April 21. Basically, Google launched a new algorithm update that changed the way it ranks mobile search results, favoring mobile-friendly sites. The update was designed to give mobile users a better

search experience. So, if your site isn't deemed mobile-friendly, you're relegated to the back of the search rankings line—so much for all of that sweet mobile search traffic, which accounts for roughly 30 percent of all searches.

There's a silver lining, however. You can save your site from the mobilegeddon aftershock, and you won't even need to hire Ben Affleck and his band of rugged astronauts (an Aerosmith soundtrack is optional). Here are some steps you can take make sure your site is mobile-friendly:

- Get rid of anything that doesn't work on all types of mobile devices. Flash is out. So is any custom code that doesn't render properly on mobiles.
- Ensure your site plays nicely with all types of mobile devices. Once upon a time a mobile strategy required little more than distilling your site to its barest form and making it scrollable on a BlackBerry. Those days are gone. Now, there are mobile devices of all shapes and sizes: smartphones, tablets, watches—yeah, watches. Update your mobile site to make sure it fits all of those formats and mobilegeddon won't slaughter your site traffic.
- Use text and content that fits all devices. Google will ding you if a user has to zoom in to read text on your site. The same goes for content and graphics—if a visitor has to scroll, pinch, or zoom to see the whole thing, that won't help you in the mobile-friendliness column.
- Accommodate fat fingers. Not to be glib, but links, buttons, and other clickables should be spaced out enough that your users can easily hit them and not accidentally hit another link or button that is too close by. Building mobile sites for fat fingers will help avoid your site winding up on the receiving end of the fickle finger of SEO fault.

You can also use the “[Mobile Friendly Test](#)” by Google to see if your site is in compliance.

These tips, and paying attention to being mobile-friendly in the future, can help ensure you’re not penalized in the wake of mobilegeddon or other mobile-focused SEO updates in the works.

SSL

Google also recently announced that it would give HTTPS encrypted sites a ranking boost in the search results. That means, if your sites are protected by secure sockets layer (SSL), they rank higher than non-secure sites.

What exactly are the benefits of SSL anyway? SSL technology encrypts all of the information sent to and from your site, meaning private data your visitors share on your site stays private. SSL protection creates a secure tunnel between the browser and the web server. It also verifies that your site is really who it claims to be, and not an imposter. For sites that deal in credit card numbers and personal information, SSL is a must have. Plus, seeing https:// at the start of a URL and the secure lock symbol on their browser lets a visitor know that your site is secure and may make them more confident in clicking.

So SSL gives you a security boost plus an SEO bump, right? Well, yes, but improving your SEO ranking by using SSL comes with a few nuances, and you likely won’t get the SEO boost without them.

It’s important to ensure all elements of your site use HTTPS. That includes widgets, JavaScript, CSS, files, images, and your content delivery network (CDN). Also, you must use 301 redirects to point all of your existing HTTP URLs to HTTPS. If you don’t, you won’t get the SEO bonus that HTTPS promises. This very helpful [piece on Moz.com](#) offers a ton of tips to help you get the most SEO bang for your SSL buck.

Phantom aka The Quality Update

This one is a little hush-hush, as in Google isn’t saying much.

But according to reports, Google recently made a secretive algorithm tweak dubbed Phantom that had a significant impact on search rankings for a number of sites.

Essentially, Google is suspected of changing how it assesses the quality of content, leading some to call it “The Quality Update.” What’s that mean? Well, [Search Engine Land reported](#) that Google confirmed it changed the way it processes quality signals. There is some speculation that “how to” content and informational sites have been hit the hardest. The update appears to affect whole sites and not work on a page level, and pages are not affected based on word count.

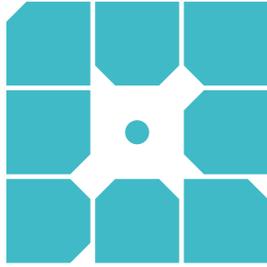
What steps can you take to avoid the specter of Phantom? Simple: strengthen your content quality game. While Google hasn’t shared how it now assess quality, ensuring your content is top notch is the best way to avoid being dinged. Sure, the term “quality content” is subjective, but in the past Google has shared some tips on how to create [content that is valuable](#) and [how to build “high-quality” sites](#). Google’s quality guidelines (via [jseo.com](#)) also ask a few questions that can help you determine if your content is up to snuff:

- Would you expect to see this article in a printed magazine, encyclopedia, or book?
- Are the articles short, unsubstantial, or otherwise lacking in helpful specifics?
- Are the pages produced with great care and attention to detail vs. less attention to detail?
- Does this article provide a complete or comprehensive description of the topic?
- Does this article contain insightful analysis or interesting information that is beyond obvious?
- Is this the sort of page you’d want to bookmark, share with a friend, or recommend?
- Was the article edited well, or does it appear sloppy or hastily produced?

Producing quality content is the best way to keep the Phantom at bay.

Those are just three of the myriad ongoing SEO updates and changes that could have an impact on your site and its search rankings. But taking the appropriate steps and measures now can fortify your site from being affected in the future. While SEO isn’t an exact science, there are always ways to improve your rankings, or at least ensure you’re not being penalized.

At WP Engine, we built our managed WordPress hosting platform from the ground up to power amazing WordPress experiences. Our platform delivers speed, scalability, and security, all of which lead to better SEO. With WP Engine, you get fast and reliable managed WordPress hosting and optional SSL protection that will lower your page load times, decrease your bounce rates, and better secure your site, all of which ultimately improve your site’s search rankings. For more on how WP Engine can help you improve SEO, check out [wpengine.com](#) or call us at 1-877-973-6446.



About WP Engine

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