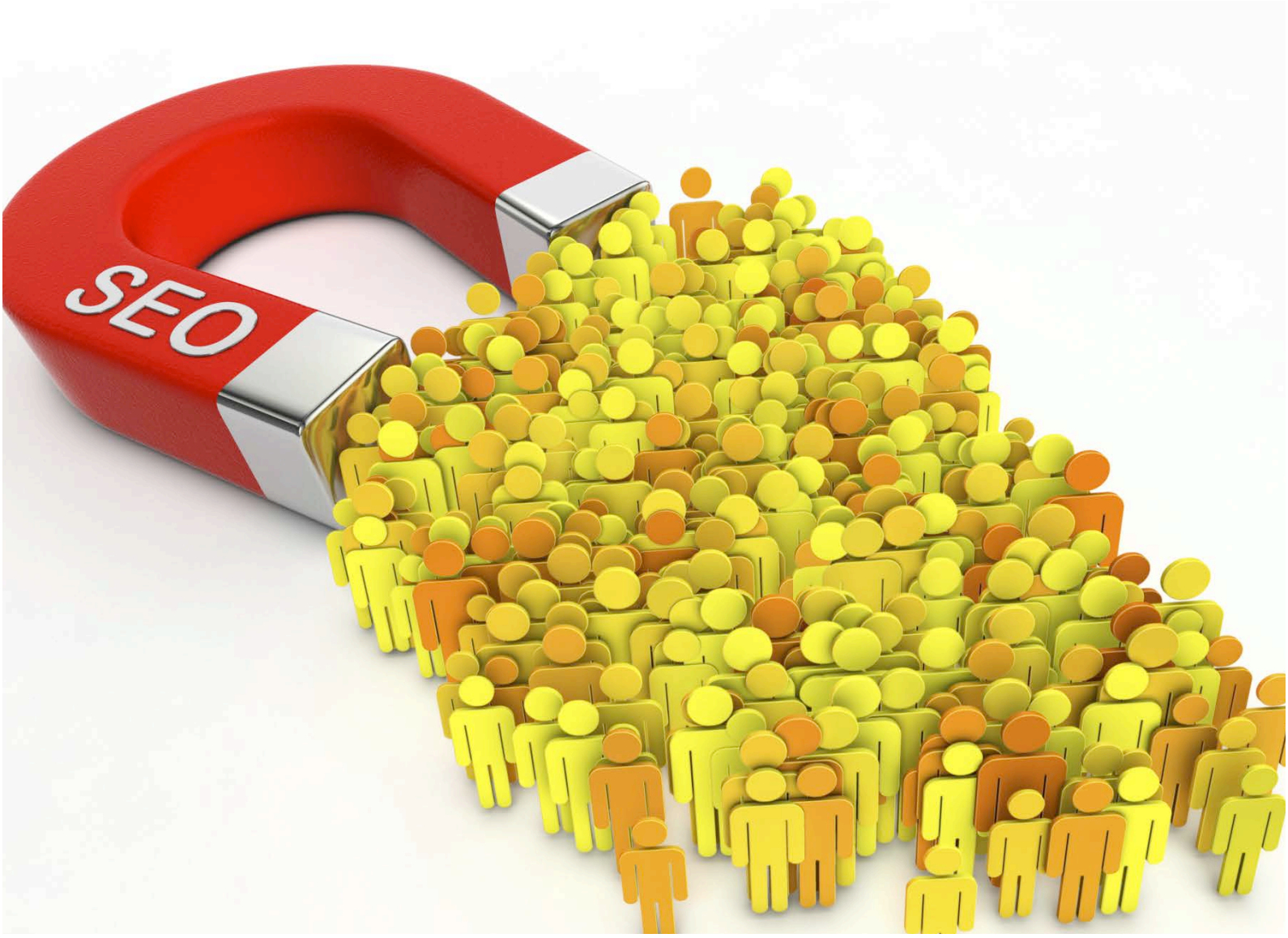


seo solutions
Strategic Search Engine & Internet Marketing Solutions

# SEO NEWSLETTER

JULY, 2012

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# 1 SITES STILL CONTINUE TO BE PUNISHED WITH PENGUIN & PANDA UPDATES

A few weeks back, Matt Cutts' tweet on Penguins has flooded the world wide search engines and has been the cause of a major "refresh" Dubbed as Penguin 1.1, it was thought that the ordeal was over, until it struck again last May 25, 2012. Changes have been monitored by the webmaster chatter.

The second time around, it was too conservative to call the change as a "refresh" once again since minor tweaks to the algorithm have been done to ensure of zero recurrence of the situation, according to a monthly quality blog from Google. Cutts says that only 0.1% of English searches will be affected.

"Less than 1% of queries [were] noticeably affected in the U.S. and 1% worldwide." According to the Google tweet last June 11 when the refresh took place as they introduced Panda 3.7. A great improvement has been seen in the performance of the search engine, although this has brought about many controversies as well.

Compared to the Penguin webspam controversy the Panda does not just focus on over optimization nor send out spam, it focuses on disrupting site content, messing up websites all over the globe. Site overhauls have been done to correct the situation for those who have been hit by this online phenomenon. Many to this date are still struggling to resolve issues that came out of the Panda tweet.

Although these issues are being monitored closely, it is best that site owners also be on their guard so as not to be hit again by something of this gravity.

**Below are our findings about these updates based on our experiments:**

1. Penguin is page based as confirmed by Matt Cutts. It will rather look at web pages rather than the whole domain. Some things that it will look out for are hidden links, repetitive keywords (keyword stuffing), and overuse of same anchor text.

2. Google looks at backlink pages as well. Links from Penguin affected pages are not recommended. Links from such pages offer negative link juice, which does impacts rankings.

3. Getting such links removed has proved to regain the rankings based on our experiments.

**Below are some of the preventive measures you can take to avoid Penguin update:**

1. Do not stuff keywords on pages.

2. Do not use spun or duplicate content. The content should be at least 75% unique and should be human readable.

3. Since social signals are given some importance, make sure to link your website to your Google+ profile using rich snippets. Facebook likes, shares and Twitter retweets might also give a boost.

**However if your site has already been affected, we recommended the below measures to be taken:**

1. Build more positive / quality links. This will lower the number of negative links to your website. Make sure to use both generic and keyword targeted anchor text.

2. If the inner pages are affected, copy content from the Penguin affected page to a new page. Start building quality links to the new page. Obviously, disallow the old page from indexing.

3. If the home page is affected and nothing seems to be working, create a new site and redirect the old site to this one using 301 redirect. Start link building for this new domain from scratch.

**Here are some recommendations for Panda update as well:**

1. Content Freshness – Make sure to update the site at regular intervals with new pages, blog posts, etc.

2. Number of Pages on the website should be higher. Point 1 should help this cause.

3. Site Speed – Although we keep ignoring this, make sure that the site loads up quickly. We feel the 2 second limit set by Google is a bit harsh. We recommend the load time to be under 8 seconds.

4. Thin Content – Do not use hidden content or content with tiny font size.

5. Avoid duplication of text and page titles. Make sure they are unique.

6. Avoid keyword stuffing and hiding.

We will make sure to continuously track and observe upcoming algorithmic changes by Google so that we can stay updated with the latest SEO strategies. We will keep you posted.

## 2 GOOGLE ENDS FREE PRODUCT SEARCH - SWITCHES COMPLETELY TO "PAID INCLUSION"

Google practically owns the game, the field, and the players – but does that mean they get to just do whatever they want? Well, if you ask Google, they'd probably say - yes, of course. But users and especially people selling products through Google might think a little differently. As their latest "improvement" suggests, they do what they want without taking stake in what users say or think.

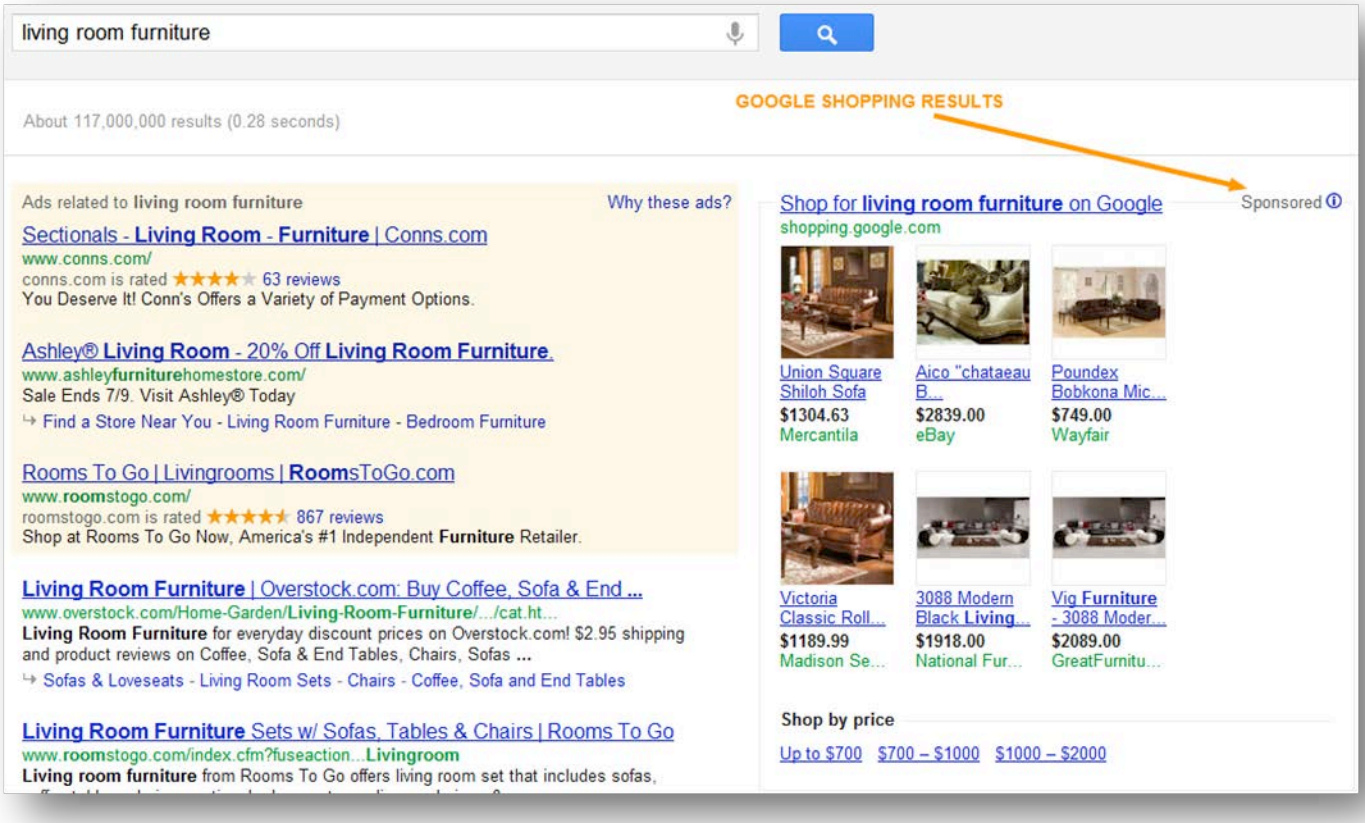
**Improvement?**

This so called improvement consists of the Internet empire taking their free Google Product Search off the map – literally and replacing it with a paying one they call Google Shopping. What does that even mean? It means that instead of merchants being able to get users through the product search, they now have to pay for a similar search feature. Despite what really might be going on, Google claims this change is for the better. It says that it's all for motivating merchants to be more active in updating their sites instead of just letting Google do all the work for them. This is because with the Google Product Search, merchants can simply set up their site without doing a whole lot of SEO work to get ranked or to even generate traffic because their target market is bound to find their products offerings just by searching them. Sounds like a good excuse from Google, right? Except for the fact that Google will be making A LOT off of Google Shopping.

Aside from the sheer shock of it all we are now left deal with that fact that with this installment they have essentially taken a service that was completely free in the past and have replaced it with something you've got to pay for. One important thing to think about is that this is a completely new style of change that Internet users around the world will have to deal with from Google. We are used to them changing things on us – quite frankly it happens a lot and seeing that they cater to 60% of Internet users, about half the world it too. But the second important thing to note is what are they going to do next? The fact is that they took something that was free and replaced it with something that is definitely NOT free. Their options for changing their services to paid ones are practically limitless. Just think about all the Google products and services that you use on a daily basis - that's the scary thing.

## Structure

This new set up is going to be a bidding structure. Something you might have seen before is similar to that of Google's Adwords or their Product Listings Ads. This might sound okay, if you are familiar with these programs. However, it seems that bigger businesses might easily outbid businesses that don't have a lot of money to spend. This in turn might make it even more difficult for smaller business to compete, therefore potentially squashing out small entrepreneurial efforts – a kind of online economic crisis. This is unfortunate because people everyday are wanting to open up their own business online – which is having a lot to do with even Google's popularity. In the long run, could moves like this one by Google ultimately end up hurting them? But, let's not get too far ahead of ourselves. Thing are still in the speculation state and this change isn't supposed to take place until the fall so we can't jump to conclusions just yet.



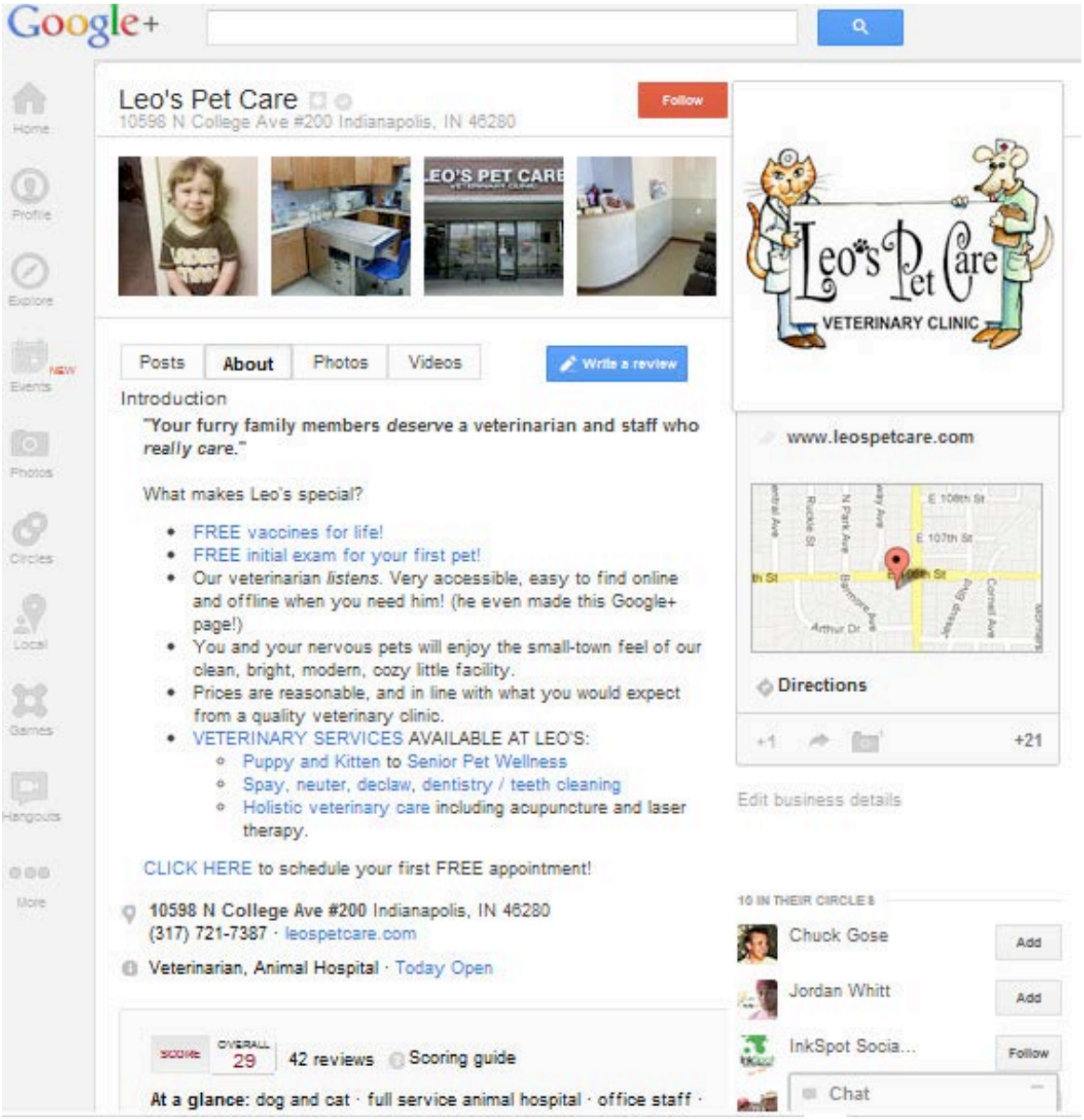
**Is it all that bad?**

Let's calm down first – the fact is that it might not be so bad. It is possible that this change could have some positive backlash as well. That's because with the old system merchants lost control over who was looking at what and if their target market were even looking at their products at all. That could hurt their business because they would be wasting a lot of time and effort on people who had no interest in what they were selling. However, with the new way of doing things merchants can have more control over how their products is shown to their target market– it's possible Google's doing it for an actual improvement. Either way this means more work for merchants, they are going to have to become Webmaster's themselves learning to do the SEO, keywords, and inbound links and to drive the traffic to their sites.

However, it leaves people curious at to WHY Google decided to do this. Most times when they decide to make big changes like this, there's the initial complaint of it inconvenient or doesn't work or has too many glitches, but this time it's a little different. This time they've done something we can only hope isn't a sign for what's to come. Yes, they can claim it's because they want more active merchants, which is perfectly legitimate reasoning. But the fact is that they're gong to be making big money off of this too. But, those in and of themselves can't be the only motivating factors, Google's never been known for being so greedy and merchants are active, adding products, etc and some even having blogs for their products. We can't help but wonder if there is something else going on here…

## 3 GOOGLE + LOCAL HAS BEGUN TO COME TOGETHER

Last month it was announced that Google + was being integrated with Place Pages, which created Google + Local. Since then the integration has yet to be completed. They have sent emails, though, with confirmation of complete integration to those users that signed up to be the first among new users. One such business, as shown below, is Leo's Pet Care.



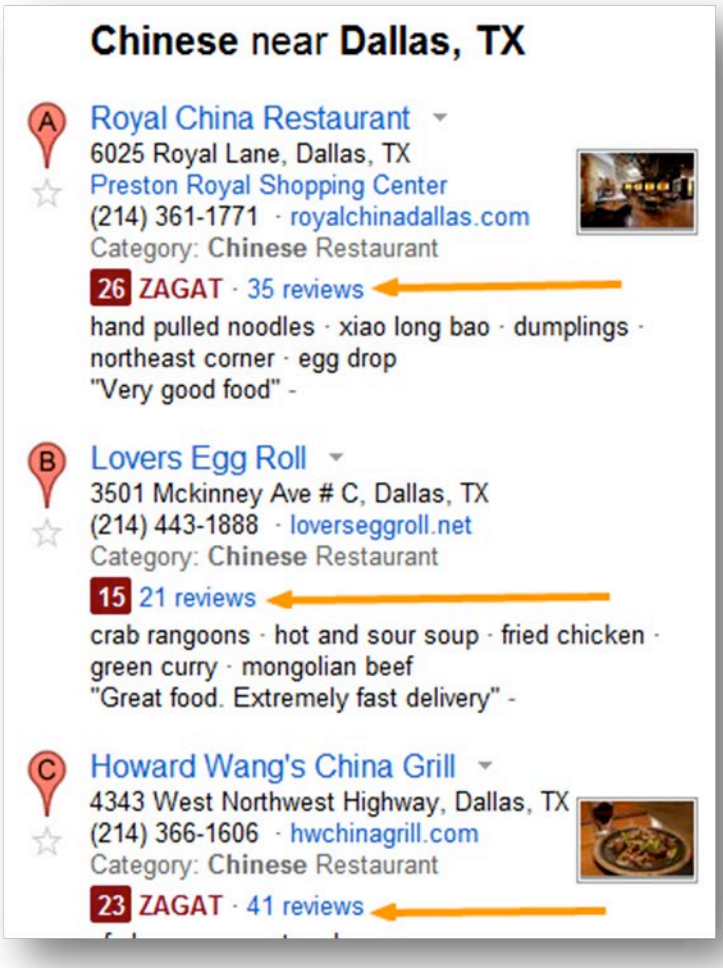
If you have not already taken advantage of this volunteer opportunity to try out the new system, you will have to wait until the entire program is extended to all users. In the meantime you can take a lozok at already switched profiles and you can start working on claiming and completing your Google + business profile.

Questions regarding Google + local, which surely will arise, can be directed to fellow Googler Vanessa's great FAQ posting. This is located in the Google Product forum and is well worth taking a peek at.

**Zagat Enters Stage Right…**

Google + is involved in yet another big move, this one involving Zagat and its 30 point business rating system, a major change from the usual five star rating system.

The unfortunate thing is that multiple businesses are seeing major hits to both their online and physical traffic since the change was made. This is a prime example of fixing what isn't really broken and breaking other things along the way.



The seemingly random number score used by Zagat is the likely culprit, as the five star rating system is naturally simple to understand. Being that we are used to looking for stars when it comes to ratings we tend to automatically shy away from such a random number rating. In addition to sounding more difficult, it also feels more complicated right off the bat. It is difficult to determine what it means when a business has a number such as 14 next to it.

Google is encouraging reviews and feedback by users, and not just in regards to the Zagat switch. A product that goes by the name of Punchd is also being released. This is a customer loyalty program that uses a Smartphone app that is a bit similar to the well-known four-square, rather than punch cards. Users receive benefits from the loyalty program by scanning a QR code with their phone.

Another new service that will soon be offered by Google is TalkBin, a service that gives customers the ability to anonymously text store managers. Managers can then address customers concerns in a real time atmosphere, which ensures that your business can react instantly to feedback.

**Zagat Enters Stage Right…**

For those that are truly trying to correct the unnatural link issue because Google has hit them with penalties, they will be happy to know that there may be a light at the end of the tunnel. According to a response by avid Google user John Mueller in the Webmaster help forum Google is willing to ease off of the penalties a little if you work with them to address the issue.

In one case a webmaster stated that although they were able to successfully remove approximately 85 % of the unnatural links on their pages, they were unable to remove all of them. This, according to the webmaster seeking help, was due to a combination of both mystery and abandoned accounts. Mueller replied by stating that:

"It sounds like you must have covered a lot of ground if you have already resolved 85 % of the unnatural links. For those that you cannot remove my suggestion is that you document them and send them to Google with a request for reconsideration of the penalty. Be sure to include those that have had issues that you resolved as well."

Some Google users may be looking at this percentage as a threshold for what needs to be done in order to get unnatural link penalties lifted, it is important to point out that it is not likely that Google has a definitive number in mind when it comes to getting penalties lifted, nor would they admit to if they did. This particular number was used by Mueller due to the fact that it was a number used by a webmaster as an estimation.

**Don't go anywhere, there's more!** Mueller also answered the question of another webmaster in the same forum and that webmaster was particularly successful in removing inorganic links. The following message was sent to the webmaster from the from the Search Quality Team and the webmaster was unsure what it meant:

> "After re-evaluation we have determined that we are unable to partially reverse a manual action. Inorganic links to your website that we have taken action upon still exist. Further progress made by you in order to remove these links will allow us to take further action. When this is done feel free to reply to this email with the details of your efforts at clean-up."

**To which Mueller replied:**

> "Although it sounds as though there are still some issues that you may want to review and resolve, it does sound like the Google team was able to remove at least some of the manual actions taken due to your changes. In general, it may take a short time for such changes to show up and become visible in search results. It is rare to see a jump immediately. My suggestion (without knowing the specific details of the situation) is to adhere to the advice of the team working on your case and to continue to attempt to remove unnatural links that have collected up over time."

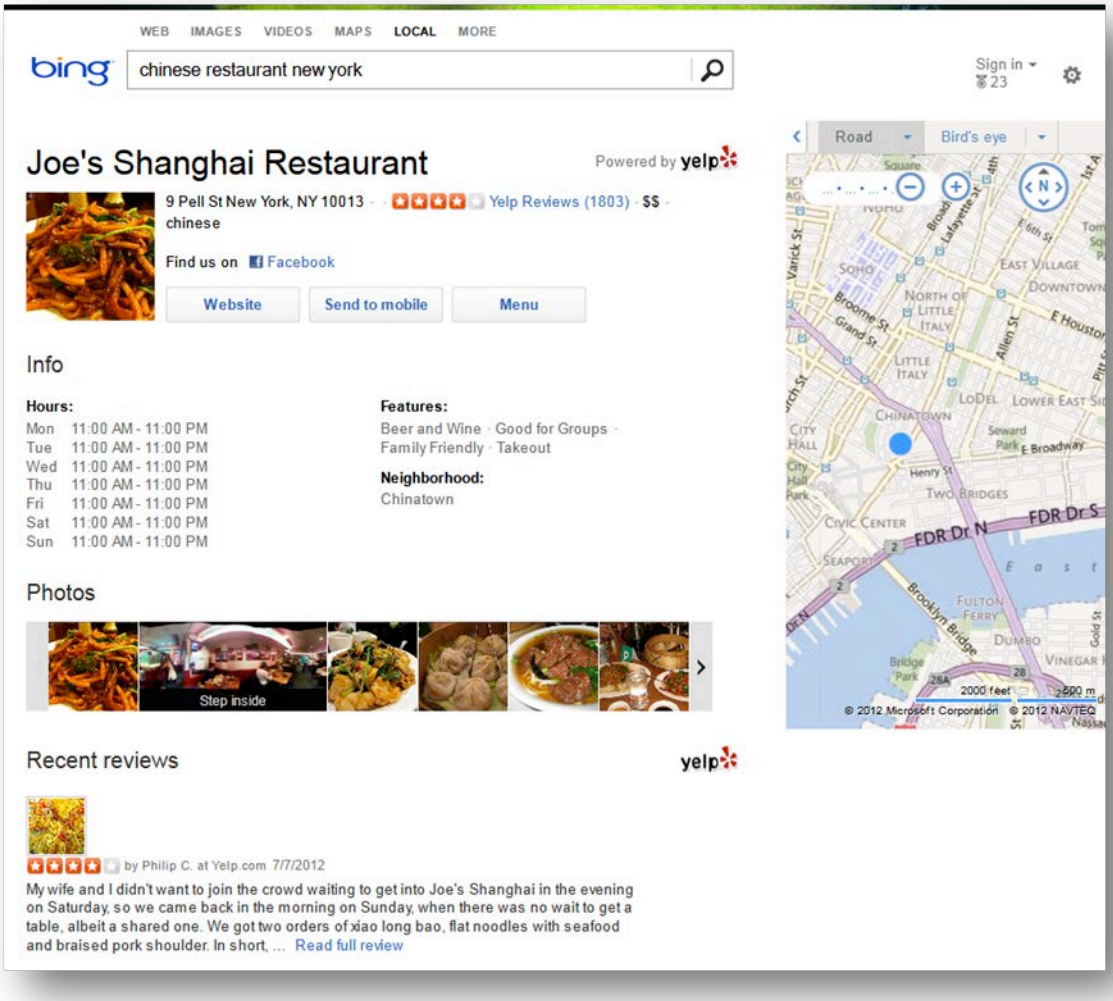
There you have it, straight from the Googler's mouth, Google is neither taking the all or nothing approach, nor is there a simple on/off switch regarding penalties. Fortunately, though, the team does have the ability to remove penalties when a significant effort is made to remove unnatural links. A little bit of willingness to work with the Google team to remove unnatural links can mean reaching that threshold where they remove the penalty altogether.

In other Google-related news, Google's Matt Cutts also made the statement that notifications that you receive from Webmasters Tools regarding inorganic links are evidence of a manual penalty hit. What does this mean? In simple terms, it means that the Google employee who sent you the message reviewed your site personally.

## 4 YELP NOW POWERS BING LOCAL RESULTS

Bing broke the news to the public on June 14th regarding its new partnership with Yelp. Since Yelp has been an industry leader in online reviews and local, authoritative business information, it is no surprise that Bing chose Yelp to partner up with. And then add the fact that users tend to love Yelp's services too.

Yelp's 27 million reviews and detailed information regarding local businesses, including operating hours, photos, and more, have already been integrated into Bing Local Results, which shows that Bing has wasted no time. Overnight this move has taken Bing Local Results to a completely different level. The screenshot below represents only some of the changes made within Bing's local results page.



The above example, as you can see, shows that the new and improved Bing Local Business results, are clearly powered by Yelp, and Bing certainly is not shy about announcing it. Not every business includes Yelp information as of this publication, but we are confident that there will be a quick transition. So, be patient if you do not yet see your business's updated results.

The Bing/Yelp Merger is definitely a great deal for both companies, as it not only helps Yelp to gain exposure with a major search engine that links to their reviews, but it also allows Bing to match their results more closely to Google's considerably popular place pages, for example Google + Local. Details regarding the financial aspect of the deal were not revealed, but all other details are available throughout this Yelp Press Release.

**Be sure that your Yelp.com listing is accurate!**

You need to be sure you have a good Yelp profile. Take care of this first, and if you do not already have a Yelp profile then you need to make one right away. Yelp offers free business accounts, and there is no reason not to handle this immediately because all you have to do is sign up at biz.yelp.com. It is important to remember that restaurants are not the only businesses that can benefit from using Yelp. You can find information on every type of business from pool and hot tub retailers to horseback riding. Yelp is truly an indispensable asset to local businesses of any kind.

After establishing your profile, you can steer your customers towards Yelp to leave reviews about your business. One of the top ranking factors considered in local search results are Online Reviews. Spreading these reviews is crucial if you wish to be a fierce competitor in any local market, on Google as well as Bing.

**On a final note:**

It is absolutely necessary to establish a local Bing listing if you have not already done so. It would be a major disservice to not tell you this, as this is a must have. Although Google may be bigger than Bing, they are growing quickly. In addition there is a long list of businesses that will attest to the fact that they get as much traffic from Bing, maybe even more. So get started today by using this Complete Guide to Bing's New Local Business Portal.

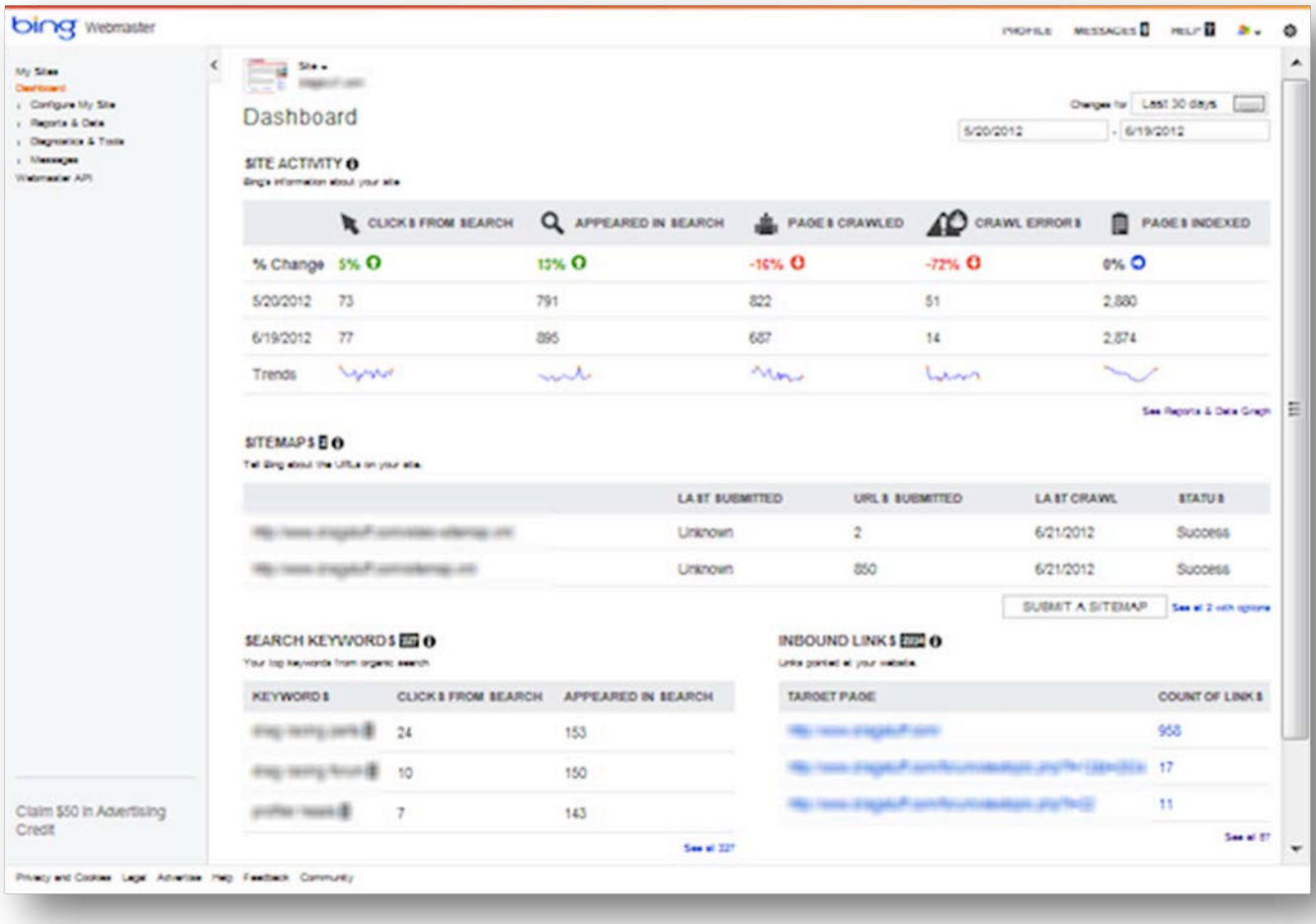
Also, Yelp will continue to grow with the help of other mergers, namely the Yelp/Siri integration into Apple Maps service that was recently announced by Apple.

# 5 BING WEBMASTERS TOOLBOX NOW SHOWS LINK DATA

It's like opening a Christmas gift early or winning a contest you didn't enter. That's the kind of excitement people are giving BING's new installment of their Link Explorer.

This things a real beauty – it makes things much easier for those of us who are focusing on inbound links. We all know that these links are jewels when trying to drive traffic and BING has given us a helpful tool to make our lives a little easier. BING has a lot of pressure when it is facing its mortal rival – Google. That might be why it felt some pressure to release some tools that would really have Webmaster's everywhere jumping for joy at the ease of control they have doing their analytics.

## Making Things A LOT Easier

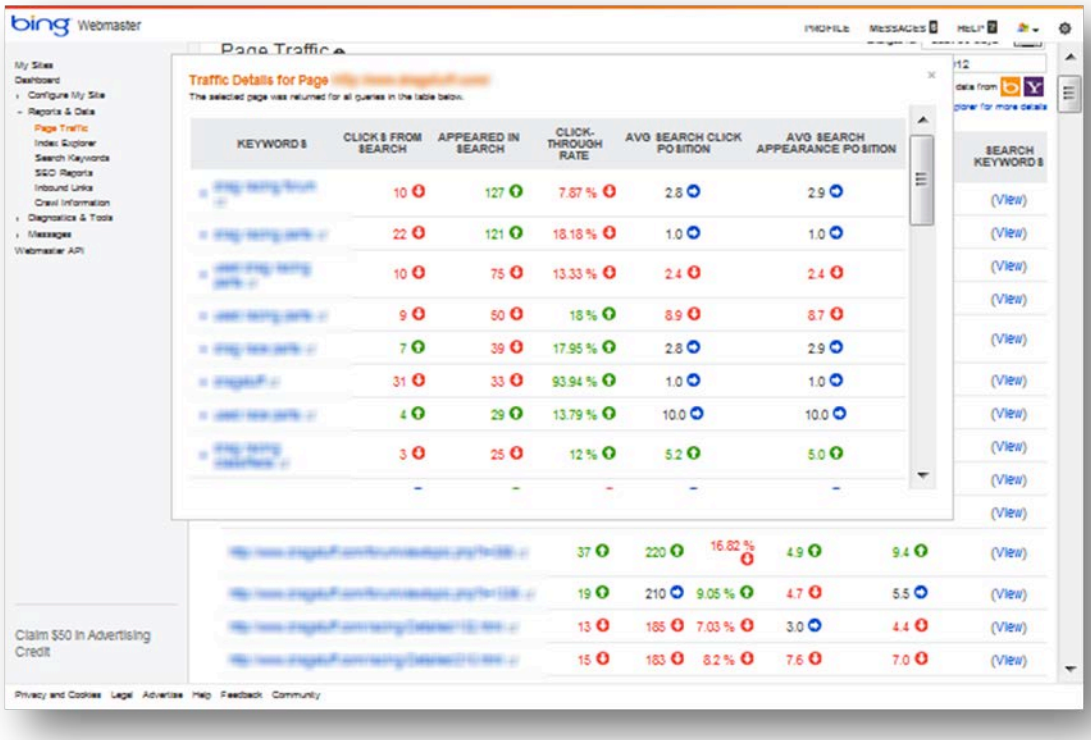


This easy to read layout depicted above is self-explanatory. They seem to have focused on making our lives easier and have really managed to out do themselves in offering us an easy and user-friendly way to track and/or compare data and your competitor's data surrounding inbound links. If you know anything about website management you know just how important it is to track this information. You have to know what keywords you're hitting and what ones you're not. And a lot of times, even more importantly is how well your competitors are doing. This tool allows you to compare these statistics side by side allowing you to practically effortlessly analyze this numbers. Also you can see a small graphic to really help you visualize that's happening with your stuff.

**Some Timing Issues**

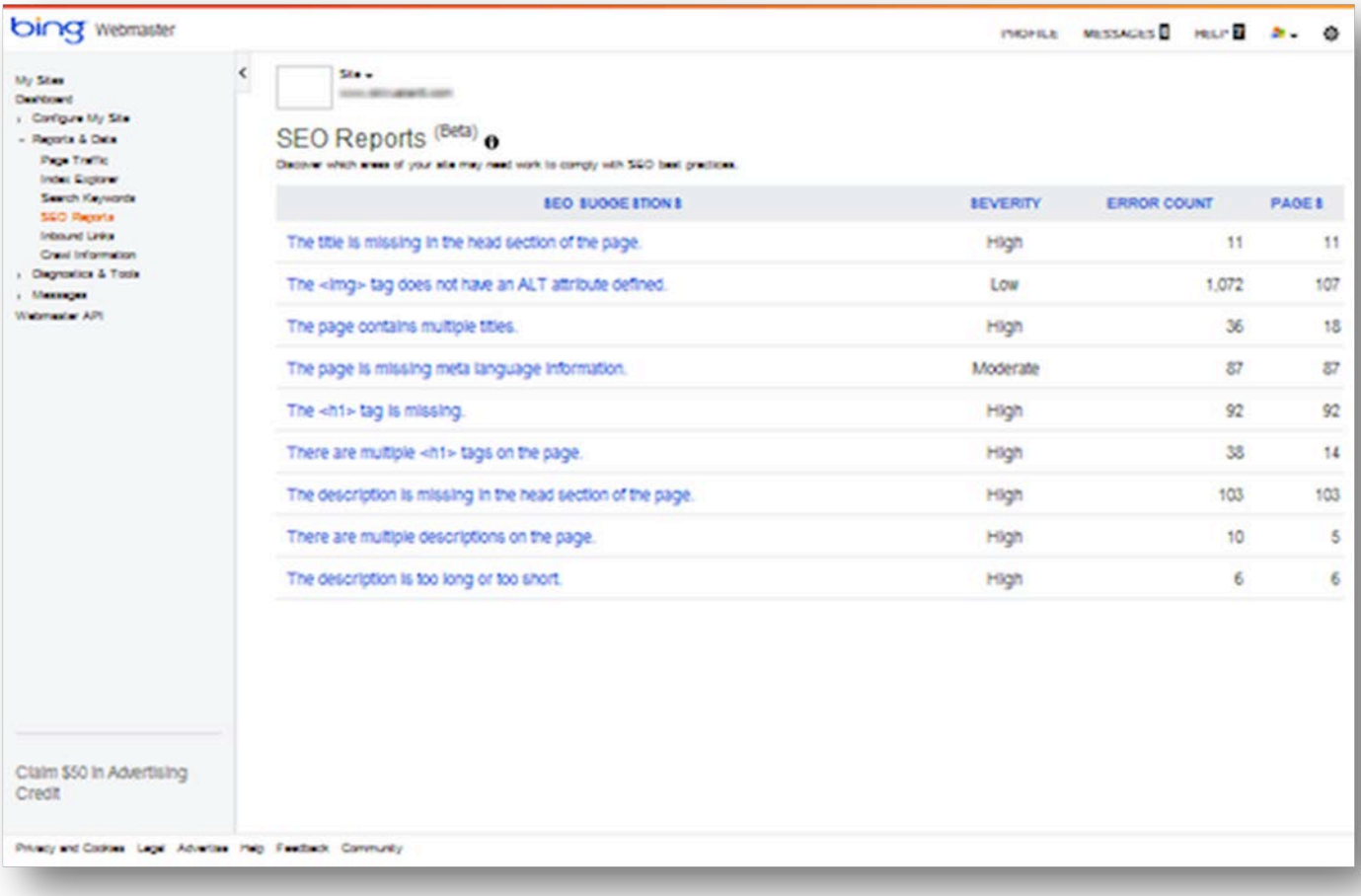
To not get confused by the graphics or numbers it's important to note that BING works this like a sales report. It shows the last day's traffic on the first day of the range you've selected to view. It's not giving you a report of the entire time period. This could be considered a glitch in the system, but this is one we are all willing to deal with considering the usefulness of this thing. Things happen very fast in this business and getting behind just one day can mean everything – that's why it's important to realize the systems timing if you are planning on implementing this program.

**Reports and Date - Page Traffic**



If you look closely here you'll see a detailed outline on how well you're busier pages are doing on BING. AND if that's not enough – if you click on the page, the program automatically tells you which keywords you are ranking in, number of clicks, CTR, it's Average Search Position, AND its Average Search Click Position. This is essential for knowing if you're hitting your target keywords and if your SEO is working. It allows you essentially check yourself and your work. Thus allowing you to re-evaluate what words you need to tweet and what ones are working well, all the while comparing them to your competitors – this is really the Webmaster's dream.

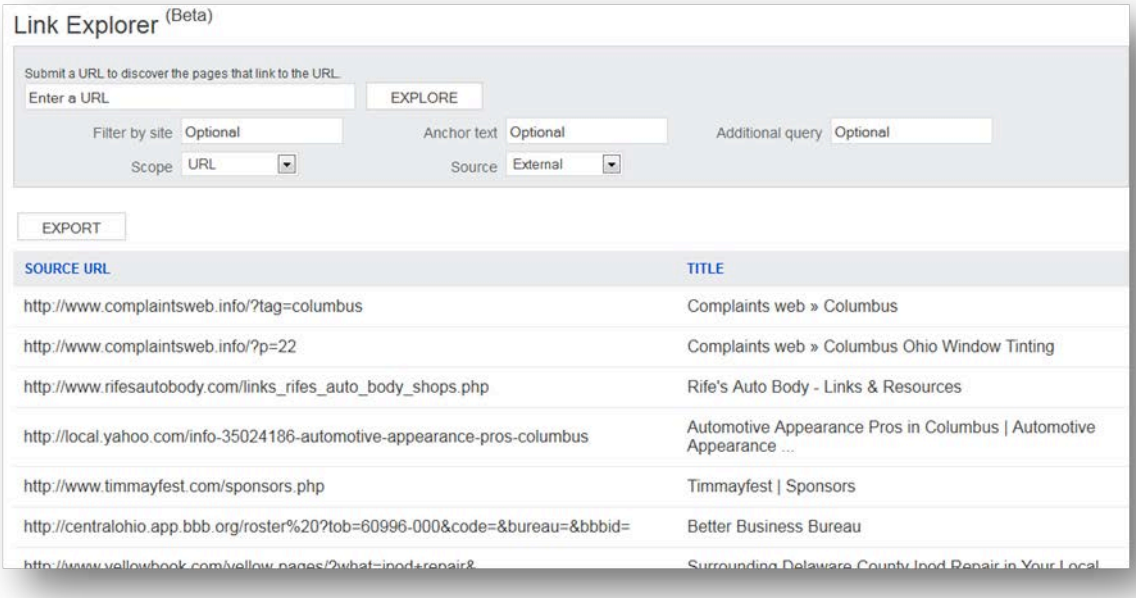
This isn't all either. They've got an assortment of tools for you to play around with. This includes a SEO Report.



This picture was taken from a site that had several issues. This page was put in as an example to show how the tool would detect different pages. This was a good test for the program because it did notice the errors. This is great because sometimes these kinds of problems can make for real big issues later on. This is especially useful if you are working with several pages at the same time. It is sometimes hard to go through every website to check every page for problems that's why if you have a tool that can automatically recognize blaring problems with the page that can save you time and effort down the road. But you've got to understand too that just because this program and detect that there is an issue, doesn't mean the system will know what it is or certainly not how to fix it – this program might work like magic but you've still got to put in some work someplace.

**Link Explorer**

This is what we've ALL been waiting for. If you're not operating your site as a hobby or a personal blog, and you're working it like a business you know that an important part to getting ahead in this game is to manage your links, inbound links that is and manage them well. That's what's really going to drive the traffic to your sites. This is because if you can get the right inbound links you can get people clicking on your site without them even realizing it and hopefully your content it up to snuff enough that they'll want to stay and look a while. Well, this new program essentially will tell you what your 200 most relevant inbound links are and where to get them. Just that alone is praise worthy! It means you automatically get a list of the most relevant links to your pages. That means automatically more links, to automatically more users, and ultimately more traffic. But the data doesn't stop there – if you want it to the program will return you



**Google Vs BING**

Here's a quick overview of the long-standing rivalry.

Google is king when it comes to search, but you have to understand that Internet Explorer is the default browser of ANY new computer operating on Windows. Because Internet Explorer is using BING as its search engine, it automatically has a large amount of users who are people who don't know what's different or who really don't care at all about the browser wars. This is true even given the fact that BING's user numbers are nowhere close to that of Google's.

Google's numbers equal somewhere around 70% of the market of users while BING rings in with only the remaining 30%. That's where webmaster's might ask the questions like, How relevant is BING's new Link Explorer Report actually if these are the kinds of numbers they are looking at? Or is it worth doing keyword searches when BING is only reaching 30% of users? Well, that's a call a good webmaster is going to have to make – either way if you're all in on only one of the browsers you DO NOT have 100%. It's also interesting to take into account that amount of research being done out there to suggest that Google and BING are very similar – possibly suggesting that their data would be too.

Not that this tool is going to help BING over come Google, at least not anytime soon, but it was certainly a good play by the underdog. The Link Explorer Report has so many options for webmasters! You can filter by site or anchor text or query, specify URL or Domain, get the sources to your links, and so much more. This addition by BING is absolutely amazing and is defiantly a must have for any Webmaster. It's easy to navigate layout makes it great for beginners and its detailed data retrieval makes it critical for even the most skilled Internet guru. BING has really out done themselves on this one.

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