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## How Google Killed The Long Tail

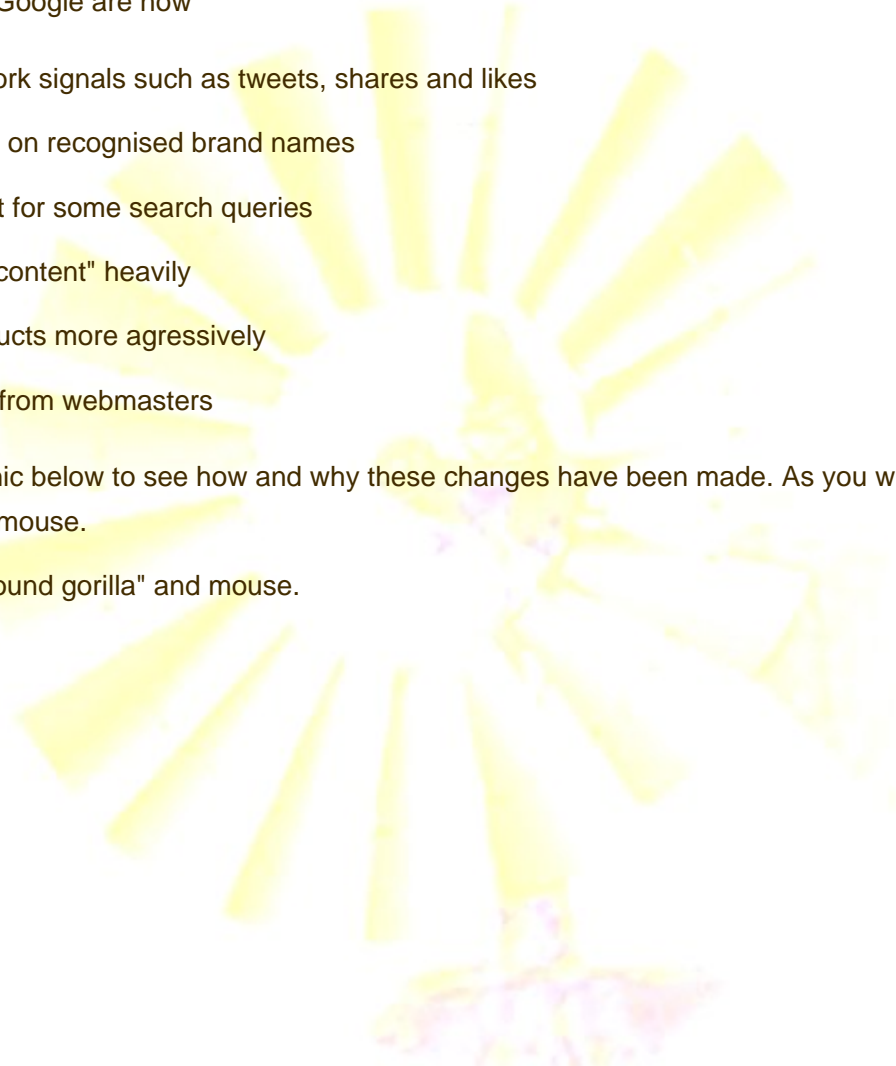
By [Roger Keays](#), 2 December 2011

This year was a year of big change in Search Engine Optimisation. Google particularly have made some sw changes to their algorithm. Google are now

- listening to social network signals such as tweets, shares and likes
- placing more emphasis on recognised brand names
- rewarding fresh content for some search queries
- penalising "low quality content" heavily
- pushing their own products more aggressively
- hiding query keywords from webmasters

Take a look at the infographic below to see how and why these changes have been made. As you will see, it remains a game of cat and mouse.

Or more accurately, "500-pound gorilla" and mouse.



# How GOOGLE KILLED the LONG TAIL 🔍

LONG TAIL • LNOG TAIL • SGGG TAIL  
LONGG TAIL • LAWNG TALE • LONGTAIL CATS • LONG TAIL DOGS

## SPELL CORRECTION

Lnog tail search 🔍

Long



Historically, roughly 10% of search queries were misspelled

SEO's created pages specifically targeting misspelled queries. However, Google now auto-replaces misspelled queries with what they thought the searcher intended to search for, thus eliminating the efficacy of pages targeted for longtail misspellings.

## GOOGLE PLACES & LOCALIZATION

Insertion of Google Places & localization of the search results further splits up traffic.



FULLY INDEXED  
BRANDED SITE

LOCAL RESULTS WITH  
MAP MARKERS



## GOOGLE INSTANT

Not only is spelling corrected, but Google actively tries to guide searchers down fewer & more popular keyword paths.

Long T 🔍

Long Term relationships  
Long Term disability insurance  
Long Term parking

## SEARCH MUTATION

In some case Google will change the search query to a more common search and/or drop words from the search query.

Weight Loss Estimator 🔍

Weight Loss Calculator

This is one of the more outrageous and direct forms of Google actively affecting search behavior. In the example above, Google will literally show the results for "weight loss calculator" even though the searcher typed in "weight loss estimator".

## GOOGLE MAYDAY UPDATE

The Google Mayday update required more

## LARGE LISTINGS for OFFICIAL SITES

🔍



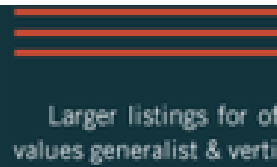
FULLY INDEXED  
BRAND SITE



SEO-DRIVEN  
LINKS

domain authority  
for sites to be  
able to rank for  
tail keywords.

## BRANDS



SUB PAGES  
FROM SAME  
SITE

Larger listings for official sites de-  
values generalist & vertical directories,  
as well as review sites

### OTHER GOOGLE VERTICALS

Insertion of other Google verticals in the organic  
search results (Youtube videos, Google books, etc.)  
further eats up much of the longtail search results.

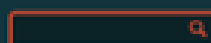


In this case, not only is Google decreasing dis-  
solving the traffic that a site might get from longtail  
traffic—they're actually replacing what would have  
been organic results with their own properties,  
therefore driving more traffic to Google and less  
traffic to private websites.

### LARGER AD-WORDS UNITS & ADDITIONAL WHITE SPACE

Larger AdWords units and added white space  
drive down the organic search results.

This makes organic results harder to find even if  
they're more relevant to the actual search query.



WHITE SPACE

ADWORDS UNIT

WHITE SPACE



### KEYWORD (NOT PROVIDED)



### PANDA UPDATE & SITES WITH "TOO MANY PAGES"

Panda penalizes sites with **too many pages**  
**relative to the size of their brand footprint**, so the  
risk-adjusted cost of producing a page is far larger  
than the upfront production cost

## BRAND FOOTPRINT VS # OF PAGES

These pages were often created to capture  
long tail search queries. It no longer makes sense  
to target the longtail because the costs of being  
penalized outweigh the benefits.

*furthermore...*

### QUERY DESERVES FRESHNESS

Google's "Query Deserves Freshness" search  
algorithm promotes brand new content & impacts  
35% of searches.



SMALL SITES & NEWCOMERS: NO ✗

This recent update (based off of the Caffeine  
update) **rewards sites that constantly generate  
new content**.

This creates a catch 22 for smaller sites who  
aren't perceived as brands by the search engines,  
because if they try to create content at the same  
rate they can get penalized by the Panda update  
(for having "too many pages").

### GOOGLE-FUNDED SCRAPERS

Google now hides keywords for users who are signed into their Google accounts. If you search while signed in, **site owners will not know what search terms you used to find their content.**

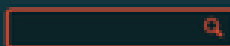
This is NOT true for AdWords, however, which has fueled speculation that Google is favoring paid search.

Google funds some auto-generated scrape, answer spam sites, and other sites that pull in 3rd party content.

Even if someone went to the trouble of creating pages targeting long tail search queries, **Google's willingness (and sometimes active promotion) of scraper sites** directs the traffic to sites who've simply copied content.

## GOOGLE ADVISOR

Google offers itself category-wide large custom ad units in lucrative niches like credit cards, mortgages, and CD rates. **Search for CREDIT CARDS or MORTGAGES and you will see the custom ad units...**these are called "Google Advisor" in the US.



GOOGLE ADVISOR

ADWORDS UNIT

## WHY KILL THE LONG TAIL?



Approximately  
16% of searches  
are unique—

Down from approx.  
20% to 25% a few  
years ago



\$\$

The long tail is much  
harder to **MONETIZE**



The long tail is much  
harder to **POLICE**

SOURCES:

PRODUCED BY:

**SEOB**BOOK

(SEOBook.com)

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**LUMIN** INTERACTIVE

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