Google EMD Update

Do you own a website that has recently hit a downturn in traffic? Is your domain name an exact match of your targeted keywords? Then you may have fallen foul of the Google EMD update. Below you will find information on what this update did, what kinds of websites were affected, and how to begin fixing your site traffic.
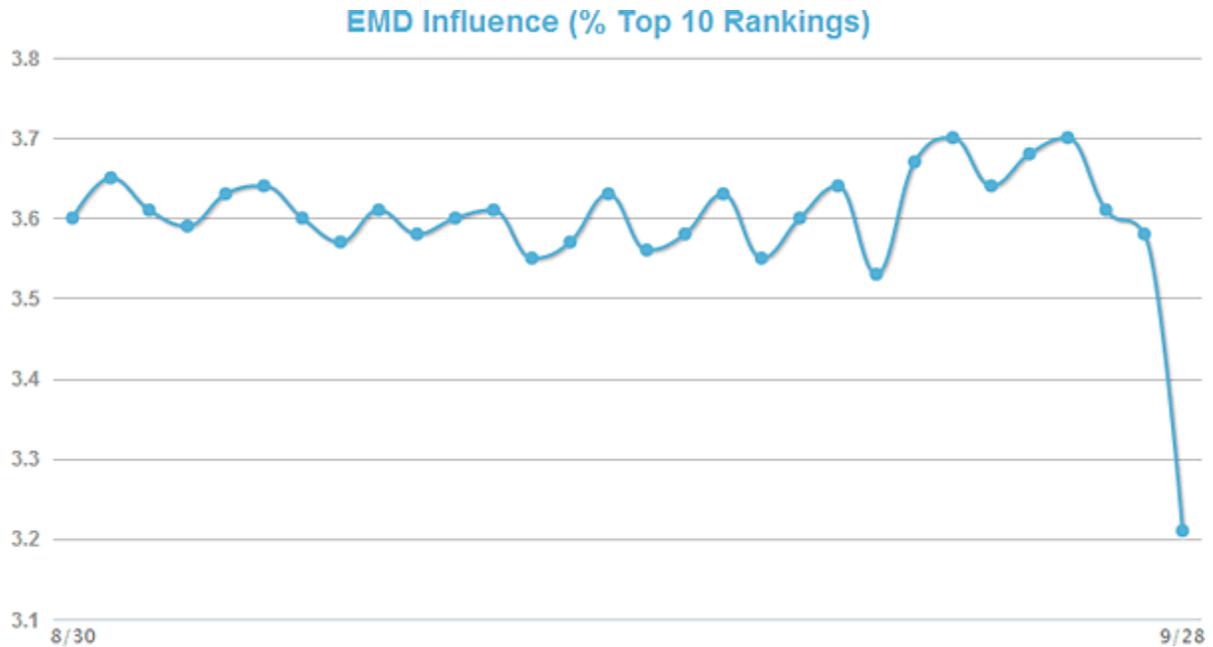
What Was the EMD Update?

On the 28th of September 2012, Google rolled out what has come to be known as the EMD update. This was part of the entire Panda and Penguin series of updates, but it was deployed for very specific reasons. This was a change to the Google search algorithm which significantly devalued the benefit of using an EMD (Exact Match Domain) to gain a higher position in SERP (Search Engine Results Page) artificially.

The EMD update was announced by Matt Cutts in a short, harmless looking Tweet, which can be viewed here: https://twitter.com/mattcutts/status/251784203597910016

What Matt Cutts refers to as a minor weather report, turned out to be a veritable hurricane for many Internet Marketers.

An exact match domain is a site which has a domain name that contains the same keywords as the site content targets. As an example, a site may be selling the Apple iPad, and targeting the primary key phrase 'buy Apple iPad'. If the domain name of this site were buyappleipad.com, then it would be an exact match domain. Google estimate that some 3.2% of all websites were affected by the EMD update, as shown in the figure below:

EMD Influence (% Top 10 Rankings)

What Kind of Sites Were Affected?

Not every exact match domain was adversely affected by the EMD update. Google was specifically targeting EMD domains that contained thin content. A year or more ago, Internet Marketer's discovered that purchasing a domain name which contained useful keywords, and then building just a handful of pages around these keywords, was a very good way to gain a high position in SERP. The upshot of this was that millions of thin sites were published, with no real value for visitors; they were deployed just too please search engines and be returned high up in SERP. Google decided that these sites needed to be penalized, and the EMD update was developed. Many sites saw a drastic drop in traffic on the 28th of September; just take a look at this traffic analysis for one such site below:

Can a Site Hit by the EMD Update Recover?

The simple answer to this question is yes, a site that took a hit from the EMD update can recover over time, and with effort. Google did not remove sites that were affected by the EMD update from its index, as it did with several of the Panda and Penguin updates previously. Instead, it simply changed the weight it attributes to keywords in the domain name. Therefore, there is no reason why a site that took a traffic hit cannot regain its traffic, as long as it is changed to fit with the new Google standards and rules on Exact Match Domains.

What Steps Can Be Taken to Regain Traffic?

The very first thing any website owner with a domain that was damaged by the EMD update needs to do, is to remove all content targeting the specific keywords that are included in the domain name. This means changing the page content to use more long tail keywords, and making sure that no keyword stuffing is evident. This should remove the actual reason for the SERP penalty in the first place. However, to begin rebuilding traffic, the site will need to be expanded to contain more than just a handful of pages. This means adding considerable amounts of new content to the site, and continuing to

add fresh content regularly. This content should avoid using the original site keywords entirely. Be warned, although it is possible to recover from being penalized by the EMD update, it will not be a quick and easy task. Many Internet Marketers are recommending that people start afresh with a new domain name.

Conclusion

It really was only a matter of time before Google decided to do something about exact match domains. The writing had been on the wall for a long time, and anyone who has kept an eye on the ongoing Panda and Penguin projects should have taken action long before now. If your sites took a dive because of the EMD update, then all is not lost, but it will be a very long road to recovery.