

Parasitic SEO: InstallAware's Competitor Attacks Using Negative SEO Tricks

by MichaelC | Jun 8, 2015 | 0 comments

Often when people talk about **negative SEO tactics**, they're talking about using extremely spammy links pointing to a competitor in an attempt to get the competitor's page or site penalized. And yes, this actually happens...I have 2 clients in fact whose competitors apparently hired the same person to build spammy links to their sites (I could tell because both sites were getting links from the same set of link farms and crappy blogs, during the same month, despite being in different countries and different industries).

Here's the Twist

But my client, **InstallAware**, is seeing something a little more devious being done by their competitor. In their case, the competitor has found a post on a very strong, trusted forum (owned by **Dell**) where the post title questions whether their product is approved by Microsoft.

Here's how it appears in the SERPs when you search for "InstallAware":

Q&A: Does InstallAware conform to Microsoft Installer best ...

www.itninja.com/.../is-installaware-a-real-microsoftinstaller-conform-tool

Oct 1, 2012 - Hi deployment crowd, I hope that soemone can tell me (from own long-time experience) if **InstallAware** is a real alternative to InstallShield when ...

The actual post, if you read it all, isn't really so bad—a reasonable discussion follows and the net of the discussion is positive. Where the damage is done is in the SERPs themselves, where the title of the post becomes the page title and hence the headline that shows in the SERPs when you search for the product name, "InstallAware". I'm not going to link to that post because that would just make our problem worse, of course.

Spam, or Coincidence?

So how do we know this is an attack, and not simply an example of a post in a really strong, trusted site ranking as it should given the domain authority, PageRank, etc.?

We take a look at the backlinks to that particular page, using something like Open Site Explorer. We find a bunch of links from nasty porn and online casino profiles, fake social media accounts with nothing other than the company name and a link to this page, and blog comment spam (over 300 instances of the exact same typo-filled comment with the link).

Here's a small excerpt from the backlinks...I've fuzzed out some of the more explicit words in the domains and titles:

- johnnyrivers.com :: Viewing profile
www.forum.johnnyrivers.com/profile.php?mode...
- (Nofollow) CBL Reviews | A Romance Book Blog: Jake Undone...
www.cbireviews.com/2013/11/jake-undone-by-...
- Mobile Casino Software - Updated On: 29-Dec 2014
www.eventricity.net/mobile-casino-software
- 觀看會員資料 會員: Installaware
forum.showhappy.net/index.php?action=profile...
- (Nofollow) Episode 7: Real vs Reel Strap-on [REDACTED] Strap-On Ple...
www.lesure.com/episode-7-real-vs-reel-str...

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I hope that soemone can tell me (from own long-time experience) if [installaware](#) is a real alternative to InstallShield when I need a tool to build installations that meets the intention and the requirement of Microsoft Installer.

4:43 AM

A large number of the comments trace back to a Google+ profile from India belonging to "Marie", who apparently works at BlockBuster (yeah right).

Why does this work?

If you just created a new site to put a negative post on, or did the blog post on some other small site, it would be extremely hard to get that page to rank at all, let alone high on page one for the company's own name. And, building a pile of spammy links like this wouldn't really help, as those links would quickly get the page and/or site penalized.

But, starting with a page on a super strong trusted domain, with a ton of legitimate links to the domain, the additional spammy links to this particular page registers as such a low percentage of the overall link profile that the penalty isn't likely to happen. So, those links work pretty much as well as they would have worked on any site 5 or so years ago, before the advent of manual and algorithmic penalties.

This is a bit of a perversion of a well-known positive SEO technique known as **Barnacle SEO** (a term coined by [Will Scott](#)), where you can point a bunch of links at your page on a site like Yelp to get that page to show on page 1.

The perpetrator in this case actually has an advantage over the positive Barnacle SEO practitioner, as he/she really has no risk of damage to themselves from using aggressive and nasty spammy link sources. Their OWN website is not involved at all, and it's really impossible to trace the links back to the person who's creating this.

So how do you combat this?

Removing the links from all the spammy sites is going to be pretty much impossible, as they're on sites that are overwhelmed with other comment spam etc. Those webmasters already have a cleanup problem on a galactic scale—if they're not cleaning spam comments and profiles up already, they're unlikely to do all that work just because you asked nicely. In the case of the Google+ profile, you can report that to Google, but that's not going to remove the links on all the blogs posted by them.

Before we proceed, it's important to realize that while a super strong, trusted site like the one in question isn't really likely to get penalized because of a few hundred crappy links to one page, where the risk really DOES lie is in having parasitic SEO practitioners discover that this particular site will not take action on this kind of tactic, and hence those people will start using the site as a host for similar attacks for their other clients. This COULD cause the overall percentage of backlinks from spammy sites to grow to where it does get the site penalized, especially if the parasitic SEO folks start using some of the more aggressive comment spam engines.

So, it's really in the best interest of the webmaster of the trusted forum to nip this in the bud, save a possible penalty, and lessen the amount of IP address banning, cleanup, etc. they have to do going forwards.

Let's look at your options for getting this off of page 1 of the SERPs, along with the issues and effort involved with each approach.

Get the Post Removed

The simplest answer of course would be to see if you could get the post taken down. In this case, though, the actual post is a reasonable and semi-useful discussion that the forum administrator isn't likely to want to just delete.

Move the Post to a New URL

We can ask the webmaster to move the post to a new URL, updating links to the post within the forum, and NOT

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Keep in mind, when you're approaching a webmaster with a request like this, you're asking a favor which is going to require some work on their part. Work that they're not getting paid for, and that's going to be getting in the way of whatever other projects are also on their plate. It behooves you to not only be respectful and non-accusatory in your request (after all, THEY didn't cause the problem, it's someone else abusing their site that's the cause), but also do what you can to help them mitigate the effects of the spam on their site as well.

A CMS like WordPress makes this approach very simple. But others (like the one in question) make this sort of change very difficult and time-consuming.

Disavow the Spammy Links

In this example, we've done all the analysis to find all the spammy backlinks, so we can easily provide the IT Ninja webmaster with a disavow file excerpt that includes all the nasty porn etc. domains so that any further attempts by the same spammer to build links to the moved page (or other pages in the future) are derailed in advance, with no extra work for this webmaster.

If the webmaster uploads this disavow file (or adds it to their existing disavow file), that will accomplish the same goal-but it won't have an effect until the next time Google reads the disavow file, which most likely means not until the next Penguin data update.

This approach is probably the least effort for the webmaster, and there's the benefit to them of removing the effects of the potentially toxic links as well.


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Michael C
 President at [Visual Itineraries](#)
 SEO consultant, specializing in organic search, site audits, Panda optimization, and penalty recovery.
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