

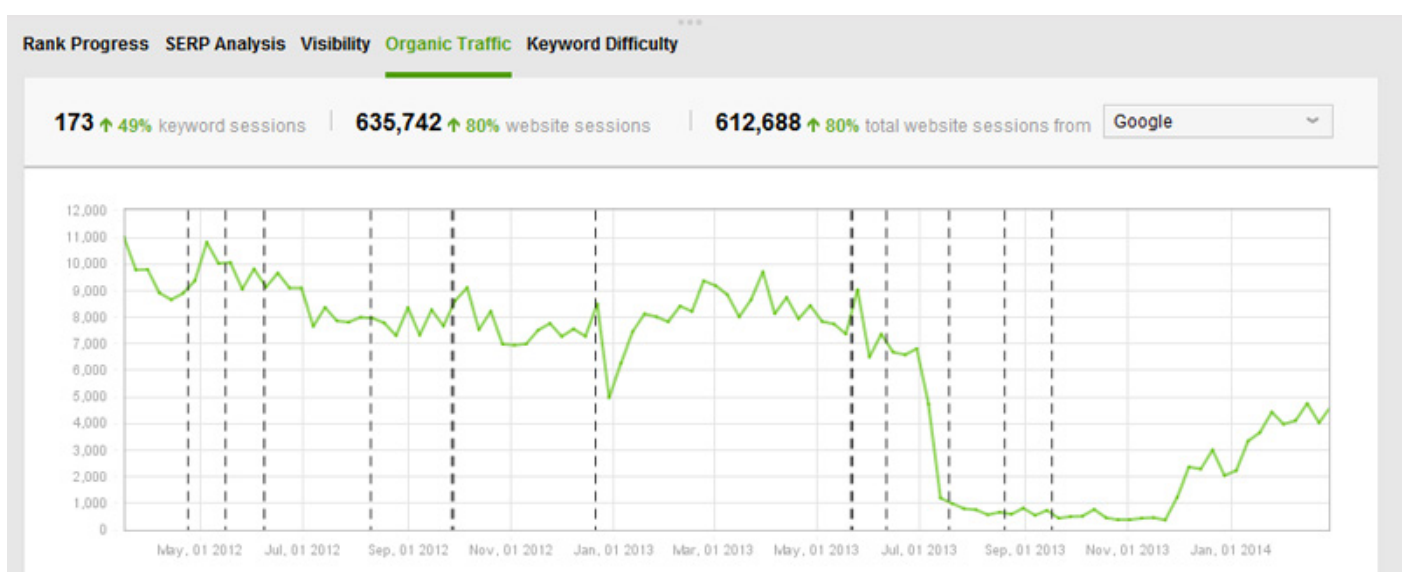
# 8 Major Google Algorithm Updates, Explained

Your ultimate cheat sheet to Google's algorithmic changes and penalties.



Almost every day, Google introduces changes to its ranking algorithm. Some are tiny tweaks; others seriously shake up the SERPs. This cheat sheet will help you make sense of the most important algo changes and penalties rolled out in the recent years, with a brief overview and SEO advice on each.

But before we start, let's do something fun. What if you could see which of the updates impacted your organic traffic, and in what way? Surprise surprise, you can, with a tool called [Rank Tracker](#). All you need to do is launch Rank Tracker and create a project for your site. Then, click the Update Traffic button in Rank Tracker's top menu, and enter your Google Analytics credentials to sync your account with the tool. In the lower part of your Rank Tracker dashboard, switch to Organic Traffic:



# 1. Panda



**Launch date:** Feb 24, 2011

**Hazards:** Duplicate, plagiarized or thin content; user-generated spam; keyword stuffing

**How it works:** Panda assigns a so-called “quality score” to webpages; this score is then used as a ranking factor. Initially, Panda was a filter rather than part of Google’s ranking algo, but in January 2016, it was officially incorporated into the core algorithm. Panda rollouts have become more frequent, so both penalties and recoveries now happen faster.

**How to adjust:** Run regular site checks for content duplication, thin content, and keyword stuffing. To do that, you’ll need a site crawler, like SEO PowerSuite’s [Website Auditor](#).

The screenshot shows the 'Site Audit' section of the SEO PowerSuite Website Auditor. The left sidebar contains navigation links: Site Structure, Site Audit (selected), Pages, All Resources, Content Analysis, Domain Strength, and Reports. The main area displays a summary of errors (351), warnings (367), and info (2,445). Below this, a list of audit items is shown, with 'Duplicate titles' and 'Duplicate meta descriptions' highlighted in red. The 'Duplicate titles' section includes a table with 7 rows, all showing identical titles for different pages. The 'Factor status' is marked as 'Error'.

#	Page	Title
1	<a href="https://www.newyorkbakeryco.com/fr">https://www.newyorkbakeryco.com/fr</a>	Authentiques Bagels comme à New York - Pain Bagel ...
2	<a href="https://www.newyorkbakeryco.com/fr/privacy-policy">https://www.newyorkbakeryco.com/fr/privacy-policy</a>	Authentiques Bagels comme à New York - Pain Bagel ...
3	<a href="https://www.newyorkbakeryco.com/fr/produits/bagel...">https://www.newyorkbakeryco.com/fr/produits/bagel...</a>	Authentiques Bagels comme à New York - Pain Bagel ...
4	<a href="https://www.newyorkbakeryco.com/fr/produits/bagels">https://www.newyorkbakeryco.com/fr/produits/bagels</a>	Authentiques Bagels comme à New York - Pain Bagel ...
5	<a href="https://www.newyorkbakeryco.com/fr/terms-of-use">https://www.newyorkbakeryco.com/fr/terms-of-use</a>	Authentiques Bagels comme à New York - Pain Bagel ...
6	<a href="https://www.newyorkbakeryco.com/fr/valeurs-nutriti...">https://www.newyorkbakeryco.com/fr/valeurs-nutriti...</a>	Authentiques Bagels comme à New York - Pain Bagel ...
7	<a href="https://www.newyorkbakeryco.com/fr/contact-us">https://www.newyorkbakeryco.com/fr/contact-us</a>	Authentiques Bagels comme à New York - Pain Bagel ...

To check for instances of external content duplication, use a plagiarism checker like [Copyscape](#).

If you have an e-commerce site and cannot afford to have 100% unique content, try to use original images where you can, and utilize user reviews to make product descriptions stand out from the crowd. For more tips on content auditing, jump to [this 6-step guide](#).

# 2. Penguin



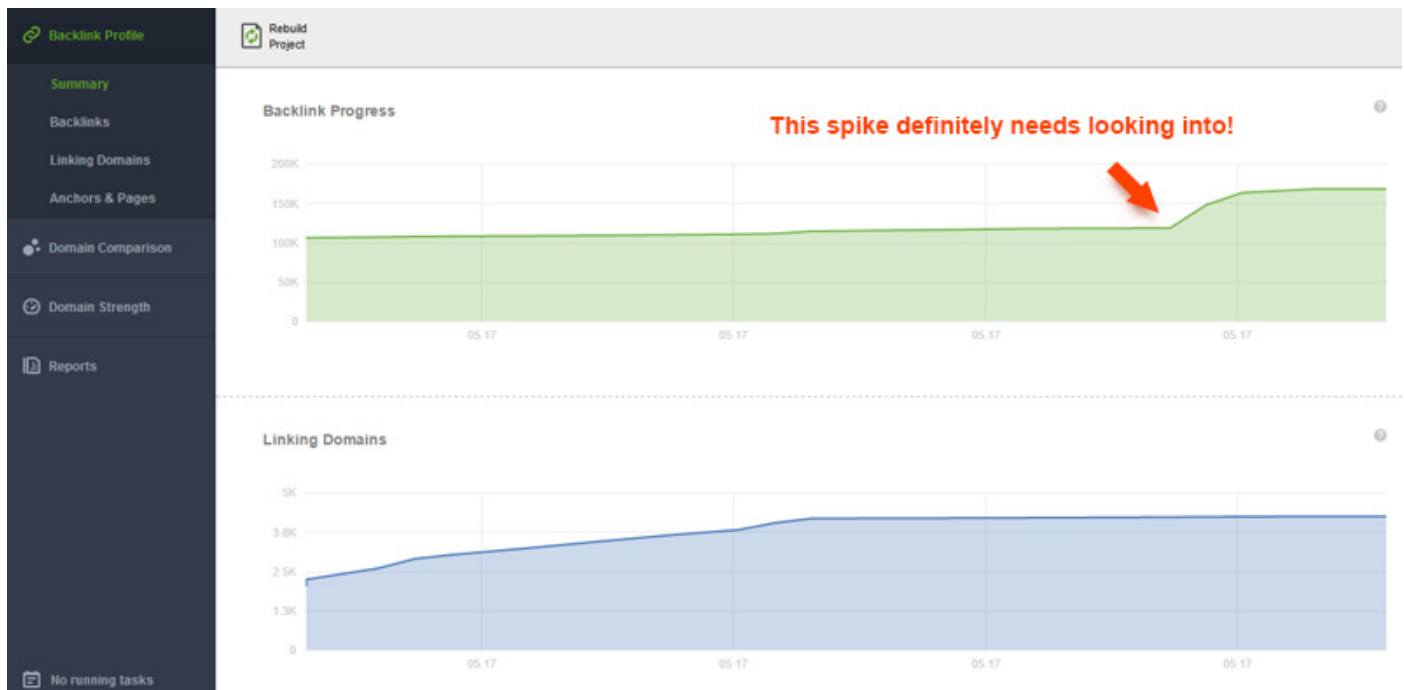
**Launch date:** April 24, 2012

**Hazards:** Spammy or irrelevant links; links with over-optimized anchor text

**How it works:** Google Penguin’s objective is to down-rank sites whose links it deems manipulative.

Since late 2016, Penguin has been part of Google's core algorithm; unlike Panda, it works in real time.

**How to adjust:** Monitor your link profile's growth and run regular audits with a backlink checker like [SEO SpyGlass](#). In the tool's Summary dashboard, you'll find a progress graph for your link profile's growth. Look out for any unusual spikes: those are reason enough to look into the backlinks you've unexpectedly gained.



The stats that we know Penguin takes into account are incorporated into SEO SpyGlass's Penalty Risk formula. To check for penalty risks, go to the *Linking Domains* dashboard, navigate to the *Link Penalty Risks* tab, select your links, and click *Update Penalty Risk*. When the check is complete, check with the *Penalty Risk* column, and make sure to look into every link with a score over 50%.

	Linking domains		Domain InLink Rank		Link penalty risk		Traffic coming through backlinks			
	#	Linking Domain	Penalty Risk	# of Backlinks	Domain InLink Rank	Domain IP	Domain Age	Alexa Rank		
1	1	http://www.teoti.com	45%	2	31	178.79.154...	15y 8m			
2	2	http://www.teoti.net	45%	2	19	178.79.154...	15y 8m			
3	3	http://www.tricksmania.net	44%	4	50	108.177.14...	1y 1m			
4	4	https://www.link-assistant.com	42%	42	77	208.115.10...	12y 5m	40,710		
5	5	http://www.windows64.com	35%	3	70	54.227.237...	6y 3m			
6	6	http://www.thewrightconsultants.c...	34%	1	23	216.92.134...	18y 3m			
7	7	https://www.airsassociation.org	28%	3	38	77.104.174...	2y 3m	351,696		
8	8	http://marketingsmartguide.com	26%	3	17	107.180.3...	1y 4m			
9	9	http://www.firebebble.com	25%	2	4	131.153.37.3	3m	2,988,044		
10	10	https://www.techwibe.com	25%	1	44	104.28.14.59	2y 7m	527,093		
11	11	http://allusefulinfo.com	25%	2	40	104.25.195.9	4y 11m	30,383		
12	12	http://journalstartup.com	25%	2	4	160.153.18...	3m			
13	13	https://www.wordtracker.com	25%	1	81	23.23.255.80	18y 6m			
14	14	http://www.pnewsonline.com	25%	1	77	98.159.145...	19y 2m			
15	15	https://www.crowdreviews.com	25%	1	74	104.27.181...	10y 1m			

For a more detailed guide on link auditing, [jump here](#).

## 3. Hummingbird



**Launch date:** August 22, 2013

**Hazards:** Keyword stuffing; low quality content

**How it works:** Hummingbird helps Google better interpret search queries and provide results that match searcher intent (as opposed to the individual terms within the query). While keywords continue to be important, Hummingbird makes it possible for a page to rank for a query even if it doesn't contain the exact words the searcher entered. This is achieved with the help of natural language processing that relies on latent semantic indexing, co-occurring terms, and synonyms.

**How to adjust:** Expand your keyword research and focus on concepts, not keywords. Carefully research related searches, synonyms, and co-occurring terms. Great sources of such ideas are Google Related Searches and Google Autocomplete. You'll find all of them incorporated into [Rank Tracker's Keyword Research](#) module.

 Get Keyword Suggestions



### Step 1: Choose Keyword Research Method

Please choose a keyword research method from the list below. Because different research methods produce different results, we recommend you try them all and find out which one best fits your needs. If unsure, use Google AdWords Keyword Planner (former Keyword Tool).

----- Keywords related to the niche of the market -----

#### Google AdWords Keyword Planner

Get keywords from the richest Google's database  
(note: authorization required)

#### Google Autocomplete

Pull keywords from Google's suggestions for the search box.

#### Google Related Searches

Get keywords from Google's Related searches section.

#### Bing Search Suggestions

Get keyword ideas from Bing's search box suggestions.

#### Bing Related Search

Get keywords from Bing's Related Searches section.

#### Yahoo! Search Assist

Find keywords from Yahoo's suggestions for the search box.

[Online Help](#)

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Next >

Finish

Cancel

Use these insights to understand your audience's language better and diversify your content. By creating comprehensive content that satisfies searcher intent, you'll win both in terms of engagement and SEO. We'll look at comprehensiveness in more detail later in this post when we discuss RankBrain.

## 4. Pigeon



**Launch date:** July 24, 2014 (US); December 22, 2014 (UK, Canada, Australia)

**Hazards:** Poor on- and off-page SEO

**How it works:** Pigeon affects those searches in which the user's location plays an important part. The update created closer ties between the local algorithm and the core algorithm: traditional SEO factors are now used to rank local results.

**How to adjust:** Invest effort into on- and off-page SEO. A good starting point is running an on-page analysis with [WebSite Auditor](#). The tool's *Content Analysis* dashboard will give you a good idea about the aspects of on-page optimization you need to focus on.

A good way to start with off-page SEO is getting listed in relevant business directories. Not only do those act like backlinks, helping your site rank; they rank well in Google themselves. You can easily find quality directories and reach out to webmasters asking to get listed with [LinkAssistant](#).

 Find Link Prospects



### Step 1: Select Prospect Search Method

Please select what type of link prospects you'd like LinkAssistant to search for and pick the corresponding method below. Each of the methods offered here gives you chances to find some new link building opportunities you'd never thought about.

#### Commenting

Find posts relevant to your keywords. Join the conversation and link to your site.

#### Giveaways

Find opportunities to join giveaways and offer your products or services there.

#### Forums

Find relevant forum conversations you can join to voice your opinion and build brand awareness.

#### Links Pages

Find the resource and links pages that will likely add a link to your website.

#### Links Submission Forms

Find pages with link submission forms.

#### Directories

Find quality business directories to get your website listed there.

#### Topical Blogs

Find blogs that cover your industry and are likely to post about your products or services.

#### Competitor Backlinks

Find websites that link to your competitors and are likely to link to your site as well.

[Online Help](#)

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Next >

Finish

Cancel



Just click *Look for Prospects*, select *Directories*, and enter your keywords. It's a good idea to specify category keywords plus your location (e.g. "dentist Denver"). In a moment, the tools will return a list of relevant directories in your niche, along with the site owner's email addresses.

For more tips on local SEO, jump to [this guide](#).

## 5. Mobile



**Launch date:** April 21, 2015

**Hazards:** Lack of a mobile version of the page; poor mobile usability

**How it works:** Google's Mobile Update (aka Mobilegeddon) ensures that mobile-friendly pages rank at the top of mobile search, while pages not optimized for mobile are filtered out from the SERPs or seriously down-ranked.

**How to adjust:** Go mobile and focus on speed and usability. Google's mobile friendly test will help you see which aspects of your page's mobile version need to be improved. The test is integrated into [WebSite Auditor](#) so you can check your pages' mobile friendliness quickly. You'll find it in *Content Analysis > Page Audit*, under the *Technical factors* tab.

**Content Analysis** 80.4% Error: 3 Warning: 15 Info: 359 Update Analysis

**Page Audit** Content optimization **Technical factors**

**Page speed (Desktop)**

- Page size 1.2 MB
- Server response time 3.9 sec
- Too many redirects No
- Uncompressed resources 0
- Uncompressed images 2
- Uncached resources 7
- Unminified resources 0
- Render-blocking JavaScript/CSS 8
- Above-the-fold content prioritized No

**Page usability (Mobile)**

- Mobile friendly Yes
- Viewport configured properly Yes
- Too small text 0
- Too small tap targets 0
- Content outside viewport 0
- Page uses plugins 0

**Factor status: Correct**

Great job! This page is mobile-friendly.

Since the mobile-friendly algorithm works on a page-by-page basis, you should make sure that all your main landing pages are mobile-friendly too.

**About this SEO factor:**

According to Google, the mobile-friendly algorithm affects mobile searches in all languages worldwide and has a significant impact on Google rankings. This algorithm works on a page-by-page basis - it is not about how mobile-friendly your pages are, it is simply are you mobile-friendly or not. The algo is based on such criteria as small font sizes, tap targets/links, readable content, your viewpoint, etc.

**NEW YORK BAKERY CO.**

**A TASTE OF NEW YORK**

Authentic New York style Bagels and Bagel Thins

**BAGEL THINS**

New Bagel Thins, New Big Taste.

Still less than 130 Calories. Available in Original and Cinnamon and Raisin

**FIND OUT MORE**

## 6. RankBrain

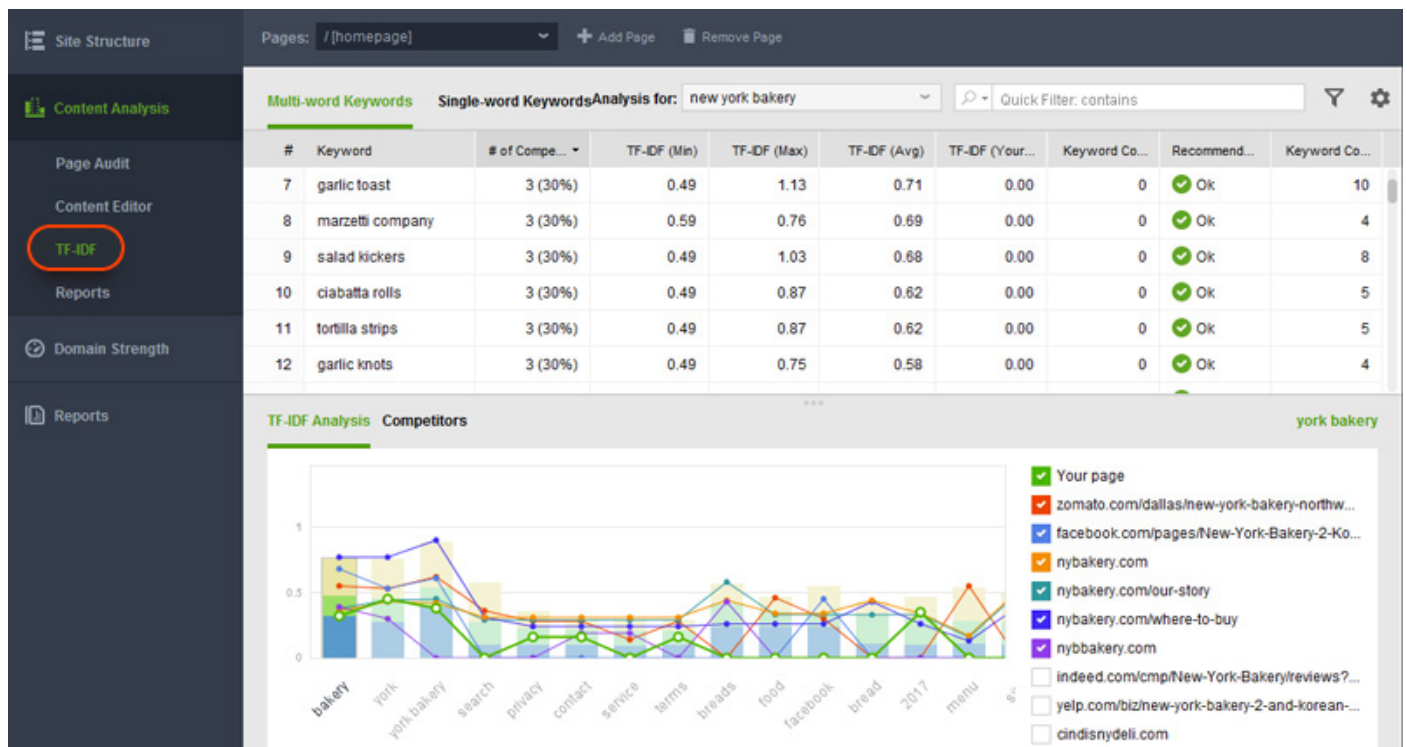


**Launch date:** October 26, 2015

**Hazards:** Lack of query-specific relevance features; shallow content; poor UX

**How it works:** RankBrain is part of Google's Hummingbird algorithm. It is a machine learning system that helps Google understand the meaning behind queries, and serve best-matching search results in response to those queries. Google [calls](#) RankBrain the third most important ranking factor. While we don't know the ins and outs of RankBrain, the general opinion is that it identifies relevance features for webpages ranking for a given query, which are basically query-specific ranking factors.

**How to adjust:** Optimize content for relevance and comprehensiveness with the help of competitive analysis. With the help of [WebSite Auditor's](#) TF-IDF tool, you can discover relevant terms and concepts used by a large number of your top ranking competitors: those are a brilliant way to diversify your content.



## 7. Possum



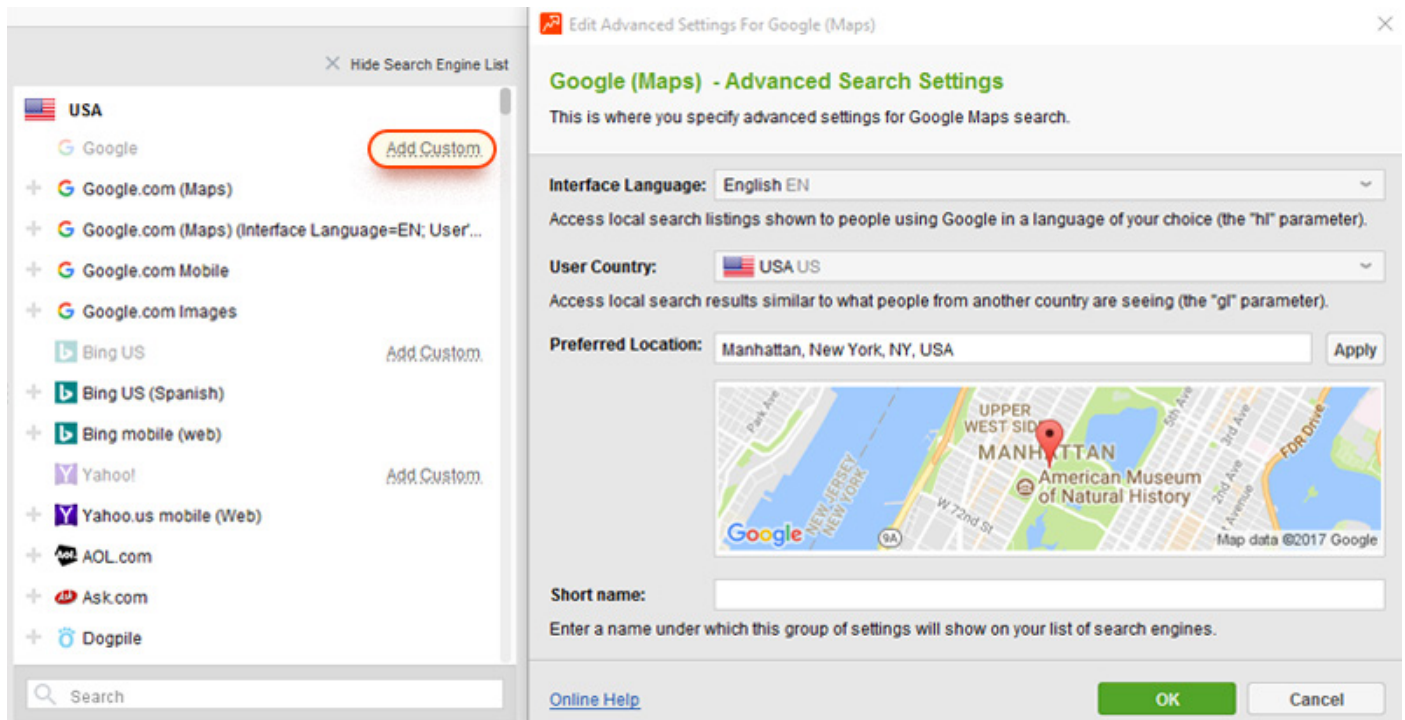
**Launch date:** September 1, 2016

**Hazards:** Tense competition in your target location

**How it works:** The Possum update ensured that local results vary more depending on the searcher's location: the closer you are to a business's address, the more likely you are to see it among local results. Possum also resulted in greater variety among results ranking for very similar queries, like

'dentist denver' and 'dentist denver co'. Interestingly, Possum also gave a boost to businesses located outside the physical city area.

**How to adjust:** Expand your keyword list and do location-specific rank tracking. Local businesses now need to be targeting more keywords than they used to, due to the volatility Possum brought into the local SERPs. As you check your rankings, make sure you're doing this from your target location (or, better yet, a bunch of them). You can do this in [Rank Tracker](#) under *Preferences > Preferred Search Engines*. Click *Add Custom* next to Google. Next, specify your preferred location — you can make it as specific as a street address.



## 8. Fred



**Launch date:** March 8, 2017

**Hazards:** Thin, affiliate-heavy or ad-centered content

**How it works:** The latest of Google's confirmed updates, Fred targets websites that violate Google's webmaster guidelines. The majority of [affected sites](#) are blogs with low-quality posts that appear to be created mostly for the purpose of generating ad revenue.

**How to adjust:** Review [Google Search Quality Guidelines](#) and watch out for thin content. If you show ads, make sure the pages they are found on are high quality and offer relevant, ample information. This is basically it: don't try to trick Google into thinking your page is about something when it really is a gateway page full of affiliate links. Most publishers make money off ads, and that's totally legit as long as you are not cheating.