

Pay per post penalty for Google Japan

Thu, Feb 12, 2009 | Posted by [Ben Adam](#)

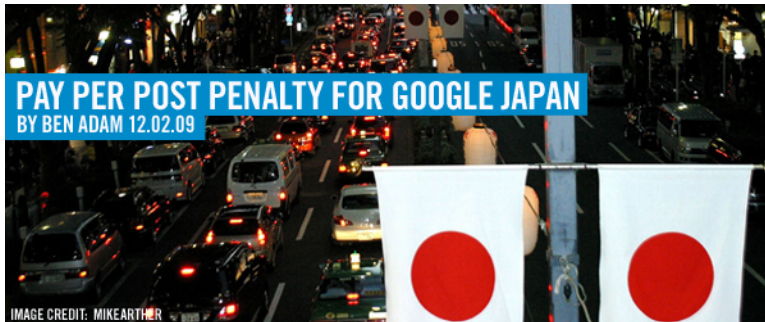


Image credit: [mikearther](#)

Google may be the dominating search engine globally, but in a few countries they are still struggling to increase their market share. In Japan, Google are trying to catch up with [Yahoo](#), who according to Neilson/NetRatings and ComScore have around 50% vs Google's 30%. In a seemingly desperate attempt to catch up with Yahoo, [Google Japan decided to try a bit of pay per post](#), getting bloggers to review and link their latest Google Hot Keywords widget.

Pay per post is a form of word of mouth marketing whereby a blogger can get paid for writing a blog post about a certain company or product. When the concept of pay per post first emerged in 2006 it [faced criticism based around the ethics](#) of this as an advertising technique. Soon after launch the Federal Trade Commission stated that "word-of-mouth marketing" must be clearly disclosed "this is now a requirement of pay per post activity but it's up to the blogger to decide how to do this.

To find examples of the pay per posts, do [this search](#) on Google Blog Search. You can identify the pay per post activity by this string, "CyberBuzz" which translates as "I'm a part of the CyberBuzz campaign" by bloggers writing about the widget each of them linking to the Google widget http://www.blogdeco.jp/google_word/.

Pay per posts have been increasingly used as a way to pass Page Rank through contextual optimised links. This violates Google's webmaster guidelines "namely [this bit here](#), and in 2007, Google started to [reset the visible toolbar PageRank of many blogs](#) participating in pay per post activity as a way of discouraging it.

This makes it all the more surprising, and not to mention hypocritical, that Google itself have been caught participating in pay per post.

Now they've been caught, [Google Japan have issued an apology](#). Asiajin [translated the post](#):

Google Japan is running several promotional activities to let people know more about our products.

It turns out that using blogs on the part of the promotional activities violates Google's search guidelines, so we have ended the promotion. We would like to apologize to the people concerned and to our users, and are making an effort to make our communications more transparent in order to prevent the recurrence of such an incident.

The apology wasn't enough to save them, and today, [Matt Cutts twittered](#) that Google Japan had received a penalty, reducing its PageRank from 9 to 5, and that he expects it to remain that way for a while. Interestingly, there still appears to be no official word on the [official Google Blog](#), or [Matt Cutts' Blog](#) - either things are hectic at the Plex, or they're trying to play the news down.

A Page Rank reduction in itself seems odd - Page Rank penalties are normally applied to link sellers, not buyers. Combine this with the fact that potentially the only way this reduction will affect Google.co.jp is by reducing their Google traffic - come on Google, who searches Google for Google!!! - and potentially all you've got is a rather apologetic publicity stunt, rather than any discernible action against Google Japan.

It's interesting if you look into the penalty a little deeper. SEOMoz have this [penalty flow diagram](#) that indicates how a website will behave when suffering from a penalty. If you do a search for a piece of text from the homepage, [??????????](#), you might expect the Google.co.jp homepage to rank pretty highly. I couldn't see it ranking at all, which according to SEOMoz, might suggest that Google have had most of their links wiped of their value. However, an [allinanchor search](#) for the same term returns Google.co.jp as the top result. The behaviour of this penalty seems to be in contrast to some other high profile penalties that have been handed out by Google.

There are a couple of flaws with this evaluation of the penalty - recently Google have been applying penalties against the terms used in paid-for anchor text, while still allowing the websites being penalised to rank for brand related terms. This allows Google to throttle websites flouting the rules, but still allows Google to maintain relevancy for any users searching on brand terms. Think back to how ludicrous it was when anyone googling for the German BMW website couldn't find BMW.de [following a penalty](#)! With this in mind, Google should probably apply a penalty against Google.co.jp by preventing them from [ranking for Google](#), but this would mean they'd be invalidating their own search results - it's a tricky situation!

It would also be interesting to see the affect this has on Google Japan's traffic. It would be fantastic to monitor this via Google Trends - unfortunately they [block their own portfolio of online properties](#), making it impossible to do so.

All in all it's a very interesting situation, and it will be extremely interesting to see how this plays out - it could potentially have far reaching implications for anyone operating within the SEM arena.