



Articles: The Google Sandbox – A Frustrating Inevitability or a Golden Opportunity?

Introduction

The Google Sandbox is a term applied to the phenomenon experienced by many new websites that delays the sites inclusion within the main Search Engine Results Pages (SERPS) of Google. Often new websites can find themselves confined to the 'Sandbox' for 6–9 months, during which time traffic to the site is severely compromised. The Google Sandbox is therefore usually seen as a frustrating inevitability by webmasters and one for which there is no quick easy solution.

My recent observations however have led me to believe that the time your website spends in the Google Sandbox should be seen as a golden opportunity rather than a frustrating inevitability.

Into the Sandbox

Many webmasters respond to their websites confinement to the Sandbox by spending endless hours forever checking the listings in Googles results pages for any sign of their website. Not only is this a waste of precious time but also serves only to increase the frustration caused by the Sandbox. Other webmasters more sensibly focus their time and effort improving the Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) of their website in order to improve its rankings within other search engines such as MSN, Yahoo, Ask Jeeves and others. Although these may not be as widely used as the Google search engine, they don't have the same aging delay of the Sandbox that Google does. Therefore, achieving good listings in these search engines early in a websites life can at least generate some traffic and hopefully some sales whilst confined to the Sandbox.

Earlier this year the Tsunami disaster in Asia forced me to change the name of my web development business from Tsunami-Site-Design to Pixelwave Design. I had to register a new domain name, build a new website and start from scratch with my web promotion. The new site was an ideal candidate for confinement to the Google Sandbox, and sure enough after an initial day or two of good rankings the new site couldn't be found in a Google search for any of my keywords. A search for the



business name did bring the new site up in first place though so I was safe in the knowledge that my site was contained within the Google database but the lack of inclusion for my keywords suggested that my site had been confined to the Sandbox. The inclusion of my own personal site within the Google Sandbox gave me a great opportunity to monitor and track its progress.

The first thing I noticed was the high frequency with which a Googlebot spidered the pages of my site. The Googlebots were visiting a few times everyday and visiting all the pages of the site. It struck me that if Google had gone to the trouble of writing and implementing the 'Sandbox' filter as part of their algorithm and regularly spidering the sites within the Sandbox then the Sandbox wasn't simply an area into which new sites get put in order to delay their inclusion in the SERPS. Instead it can be considered as a probationary period for new websites during which Google pays close attention to the sites development.

This means that as far as Google is concerned, your websites time in the Sandbox may well be one of the most important times in its development. Rather than seeing this time as a frustrating inevitability you should see it as an opportunity to really show Google how your website can shine. The Google Sandbox should be a time to make the most of all the attention your site is getting from Google and show the search engine what it wants to see.

The Steps to Success

Now that we have decided that Google is actually paying your site a good deal of attention whilst it is in the Sandbox it is time to see how we can make the most of this Golden Opportunity.

The first thing to do is plan ahead and get your site into the Sandbox as soon as possible, so attracting this attention from Google. Don't wait until your website is built in all its glory before registering a domain name and uploading your site. Instead make sure the first thing you do is register your domain name, set up a hosting account and go live with one or two pages explaining what your site is about and what can be expected from it as it develops.

Next get the Googlebot to visit these embryonic pages so that Google is aware of the new site as soon as possible. There is no need to submit your site manually or repeatedly to search engines, a couple of inbound links (IBL's) from other sites that are regularly spidered will be



sufficient to get the Googlebot calling. Once the robots have paid an initial visit they will return.

You may be lucky and find that your site gets straight into the main SERPS, but if it is a new domain name and new site then it is likely that before long you will find your new creation in the Sandbox where it will receive a great deal of attention from the Googlebot. Now is the time to be proactive with your website development, don't sit back patiently waiting to be released from the Sandbox, instead make the most of your time in there and show Google the potential of your website.

Content is King

The first thing you need to do is continue the development of your website. Regularly add new pages packed full of relevant content to your site. As far as search engines are concerned, 'content is king'. Search Engines exist to provide their users with links to content relevant to their search criteria, therefore they are always on the lookout for websites that contain plenty of good quality, regularly updated relevant content. Of course, good quality, relevant content will also be beneficial to your websites human visitors, which at the end of the day is your number one priority. Add plenty of new, relevant content of interest to real visitors and the Googlebot will thank you for it.

Linking Strategy

Next you need to develop and implement a strategy for obtaining a network of inbound links. Google's algorithm relies heavily on link popularity so it is likely that it pays attention to the number of IBL's your site gains whilst in the Sandbox. Don't sit back waiting for people to link to your site, get out there and be proactive. As always relevance is the key, and a sensible linking strategy whilst in the Sandbox will be noticed by the Googlebot.

There are numerous ways to generate inbound links and I have covered these in previous articles. However, things rarely stand still for long in the world of Search Engine Optimisation and latest research seems to suggest that simply getting huge amounts of IBL's whilst in the Sandbox may no longer be sufficient. It now seems that the rate of accumulation of IBL's may be important. Google is now thought to pay attention to the rate of accumulation of IBL's and expects to see them develop in what it considers a natural, organic manner. This means that suddenly gaining a huge number of inbound links may be frowned upon



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by Google. Instead your linking strategy should be a sustained effort aimed at gaining new IBL's from relevant websites over a long period of time.

Summary

Although the Google Sandbox is still a frustrating inevitability and there is no quick fix way limit the amount of time a website spends confined to it, patiently sitting by waiting for this confinement to end is a waste of what could be a golden opportunity. Google pays a lot of attention to sites in the Sandbox making confinement to the Sandbox an ideal time to really let your website shine. During this time give Google what it wants to see; regularly updated relevant content, lots of new pages and a sustained increase in the number of inbound links. Not only could this improve your sites ranking within the SERPS once its confinement to the Sandbox is over, but it will pay dividends for your site in general by providing its visitors with the information they require.

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