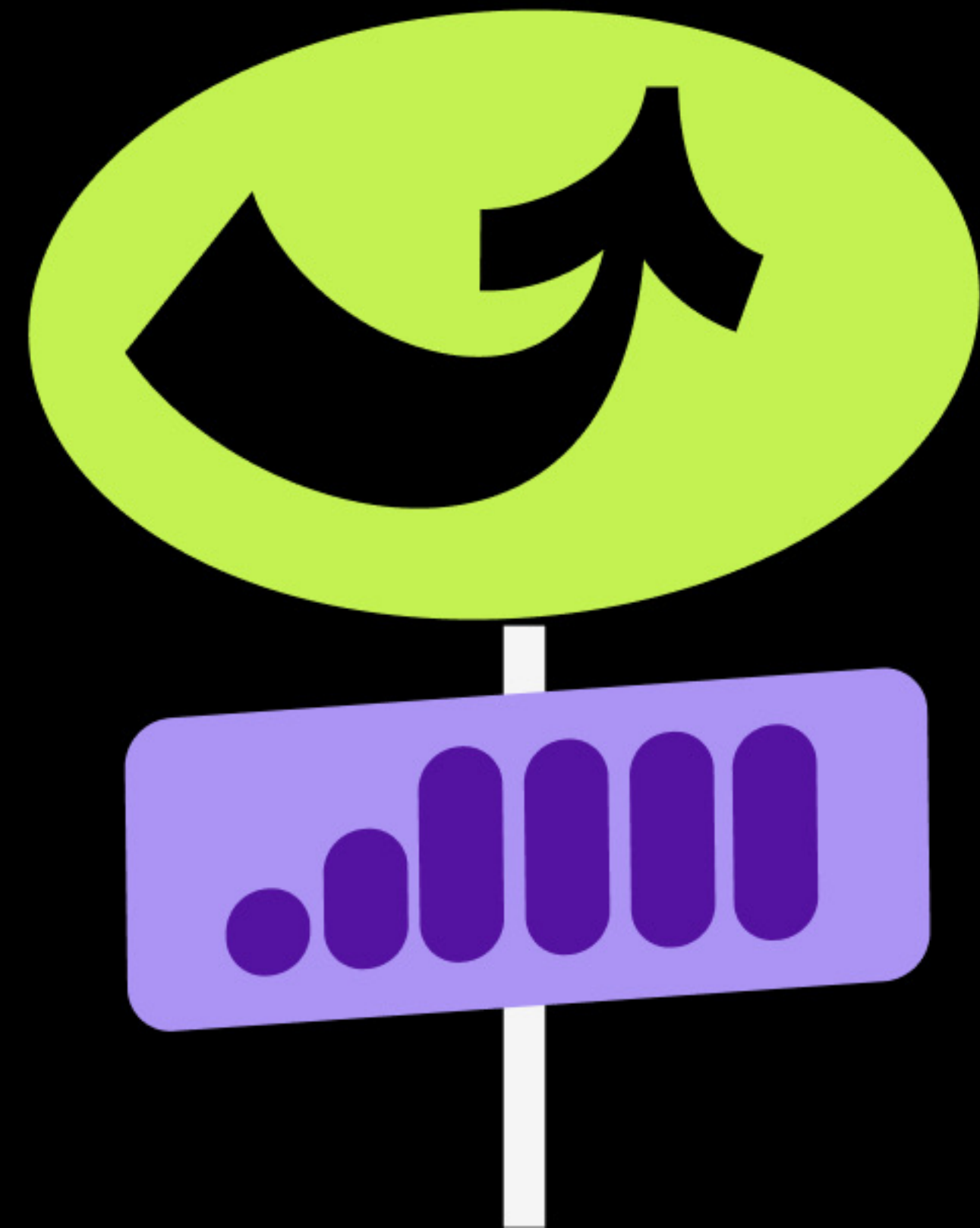
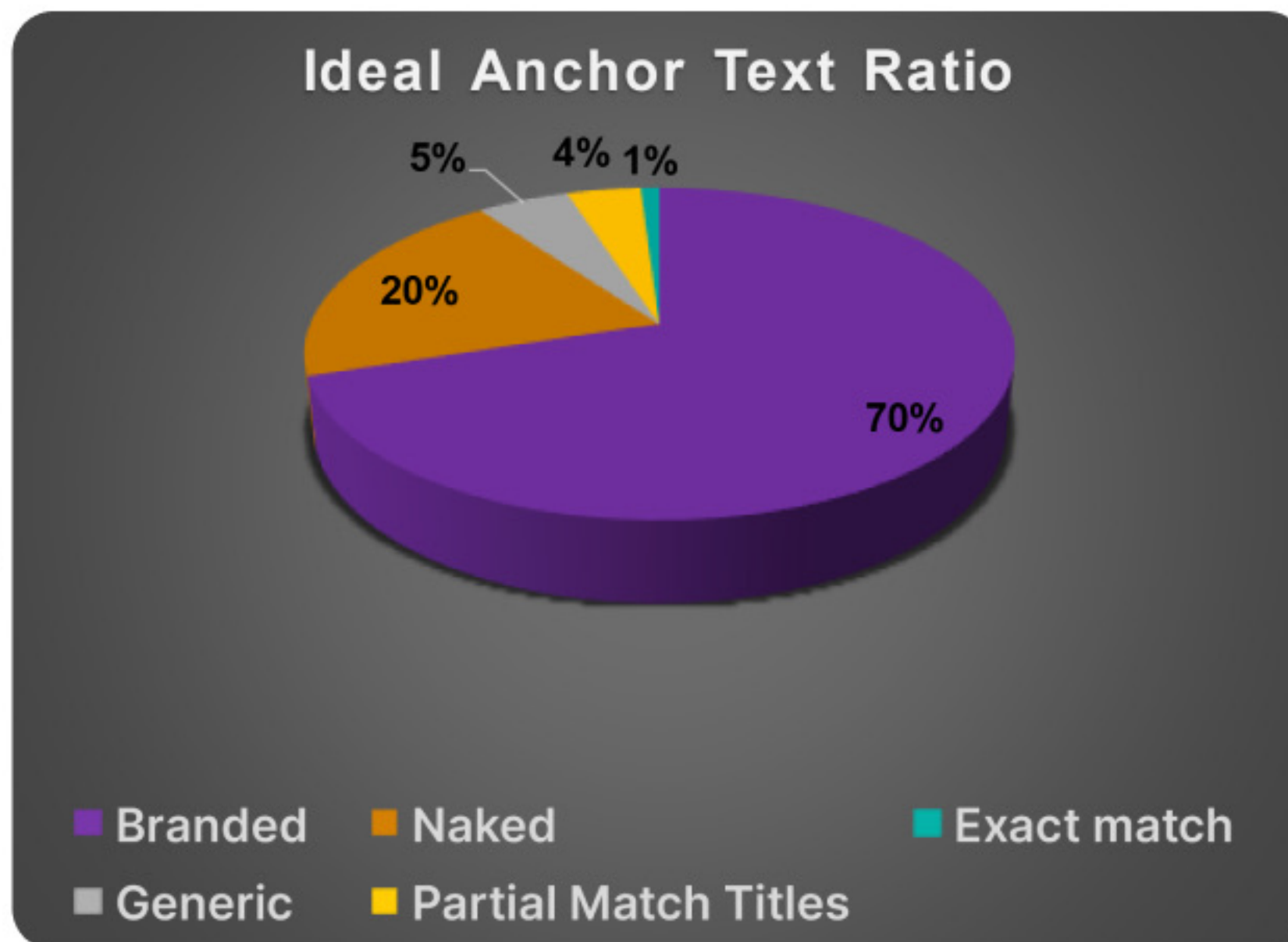
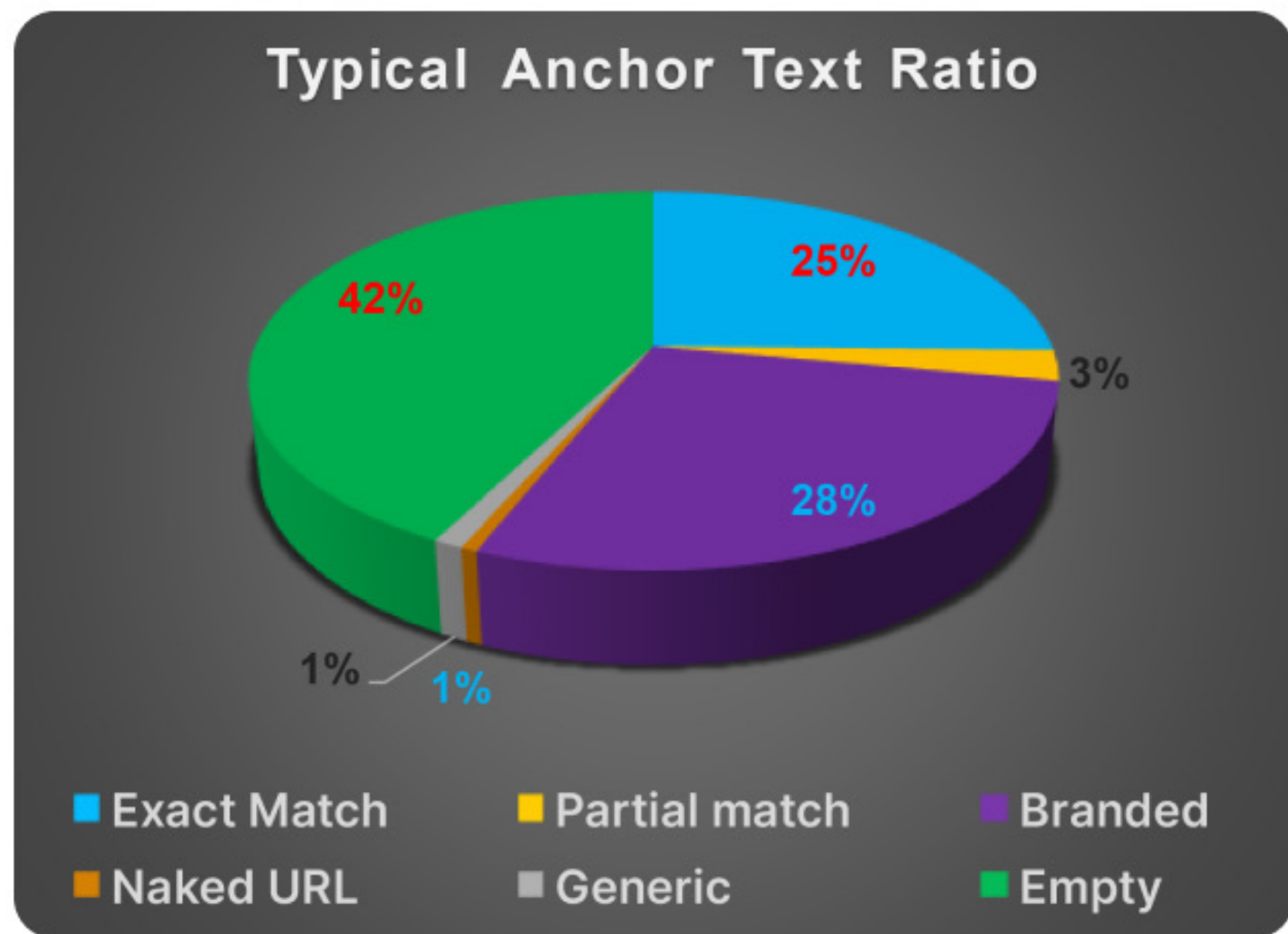


# CASE STUDY — ALGORITHM RECOVERY



# CASE STUDY — ALGORITHM RECOVERY

# What is a Google Algorithm penalty



## Exact Match Penalty

An exact match backlink penalty occurs in SEO when a website is penalized for having too many inbound links that use the exact keywords or phrases targeted by the site's content. While backlinks are generally positive signals for search engines, an excessive focus on exact match anchor text can trigger penalties, as it may be seen as an attempt to manipulate search rankings, undermining the website's credibility and relevance, potentially leading to a decline in search engine rankings.

Maintaining a balanced anchor text ratio is crucial for a natural link profile. Diversifying anchor text, including branded terms and a variety of types like generic terms, long-tail keywords, and partial matches, creates a more organic and trustworthy link profile. Striking the right balance in anchor text distribution contributes to a healthy SEO strategy as seen above, reducing the risk of penalties and enhancing overall visibility and credibility.

EXACT MATCH KEYWORDS  
SHOULD ONLY MAKE  
UP A MINUSCULE AMOUNT  
OF YOUR ANCHOR TEXT

# Anchor text type VS Ranking position

URL	Pos	Best	Increasing Rank?	HP	Exact match	PARTIAL	Branded	Generic	Blank	Naked	Gate	
ILGM.com	25		N	Y	60%						N	
humboldtseedcompany.com	23	16	Y	Y			89%				Y	
amsterdamseedcenter.com	22	21	Y	Y							N	
dutch-passion.com/en/cannabis-seeds	21	4	N	N	38%						N	
sweetseeds.es/en/	20	13	Y	Y				99%			Y	
www.sanluisobispo.com/health-wellness/cannabis	19	11	Y & N	N		50%	50%	10%	20%	20%	N	News Article
https://www.thenewstribune.com/health-wellness/cannabis	26	10	N	N	50%						N	News Article
www.zamnesia.com/35-cannabis-seeds	17	9	N	N	30%	32%	15%	8%	13%		N	
https://www.pghcitypaper.com/pittsburgh	15	9	Y	N							N	News Article
www.worldofseeds.com/eng/	14	8	Y	Y			25%	50%	20%		Y	
https://weedseedshop.com/	13	8	Y	Y			7%		89%		N	
marijuana-seeds.nl	12	8	Y	Y	1%	10%	8%		78%		N	
barneysfarm.us	11	8	Y	Y				92%	6%		Y	
https://www.humboldtseeds.net/en/buy-cannabis-seeds/	8	5	Y	N	2%		93%				N	
www.seed-city.com/	9	4	Y	Y			13%	18%	8%	60%	N	
herbiesheadshop.com/	7	1	Y	Y			90%		10%		Y	
https://www.seedsman.com	6	1	Y	Y		69%	7%		10%	5%	Y	
https://trilogenseeds.com/collections/cheap-cannabis-seeds	5	5	Y	N							Y	NoFollow For all
http://sensiseeds.com/	4	4	Y	Y		51%	11%	17%	17%	5%	N	
www.royalqueenseeds.com/us/33-feminized-cannabis-seeds	1	1	Y	N		48%		26%	26%		Y	
			Top 5		0%	168%	108%	43%	63%	10%	80%	
			Top 10		2%	168%	214%	61%	71%	70%	50%	
			Top 15		3%	228%	393%	312%	284%	90%	55%	

Here we can clearly see that none of the top-ranking sites have any exact match terms in the backlinks

# Depreciation

GOOGLE UPDATE OF 09/20/2022

**September 2022 Product Review Update**

The update was released for English-language product reviews. The rollout was complete as of September 26, 2022.

GOOGLE UPDATE OF 08/25/2022

**August 2022 helpful content update**

The rollout was complete as of September 9, 2022.

related Links:

<https://blog.searchmetrics.com/us/helpful-content-update>

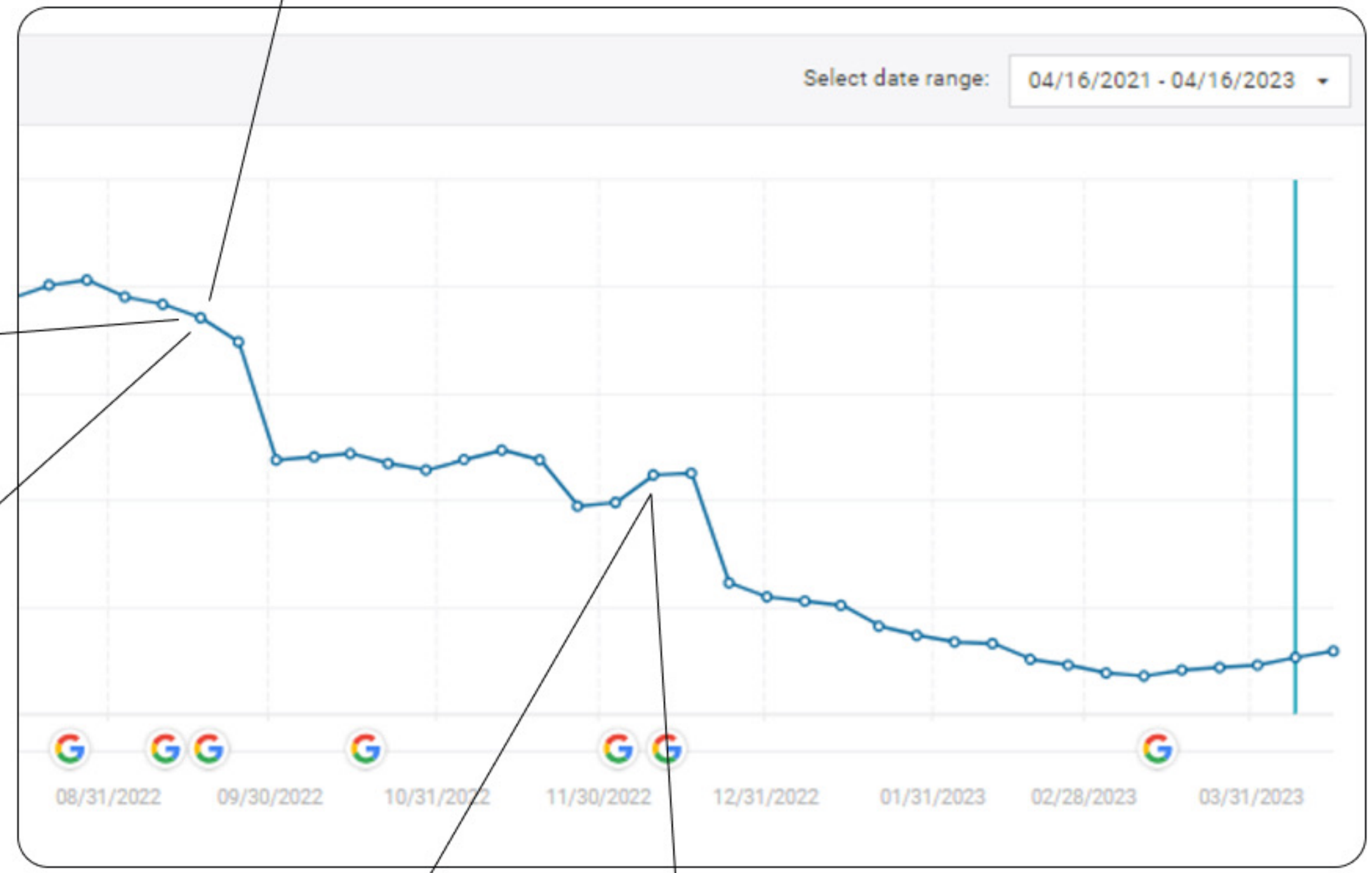
GOOGLE UPDATE OF 09/12/2022

**September Core Update**

The rollout was complete as of September 26, 2022.

related Links:

<https://blog.searchmetrics.com/us/google-announces-the-...>



GOOGLE UPDATE OF 12/05/2022

**December 2022 helpful content update**

Google's classifier has been changed. The update worked across content globally in all languages.

GOOGLE UPDATE OF 12/14/2022

**December 2022 link spam update**

Spammy links are neutralized and credit passed by these unnatural links are lost. This launch affected all languages.

Sites can be affected by multiple Algorithm updates as well. Some affect your site more than others however it's hard to determine.

**We know definitively that in this case** an Unnatural Link penalty has occurred however impact from the Helpful content updates were also contributing

The key is to address all Algorithm Updates and provide solutions to improve the site accordingly

Content Optimization, On Page SEO, Landing page development are some of the disciplines needed to rectify issues

Content that is primarily written for readers and meets their information needs. EAT Is the primary driver

<https://bit.ly/3KA8wlt>

# Why is Algorithm recovery important

**When a website is over optimized for exact match Google will award a WEIGHTED Unnatural Link Penalty:**

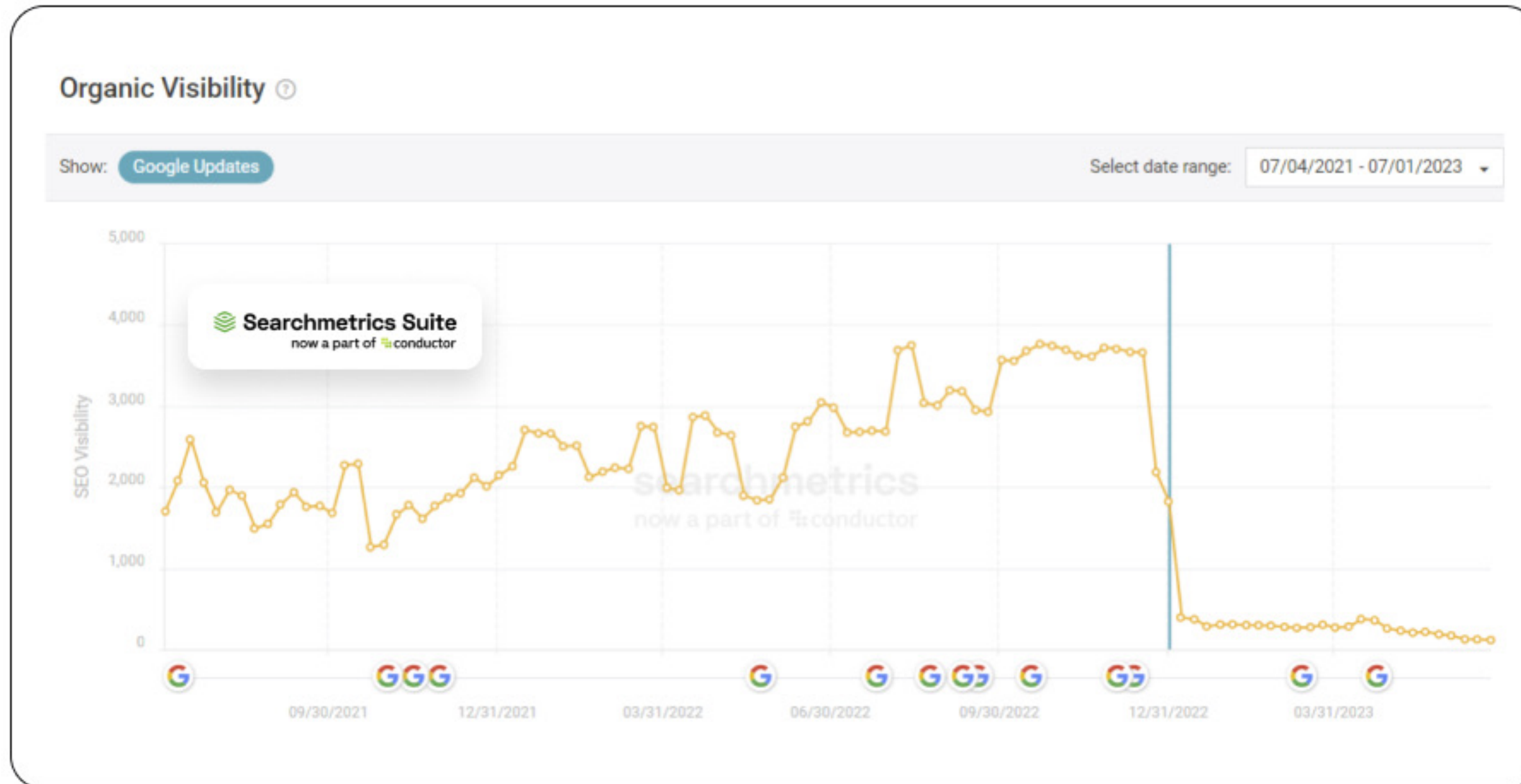
Weighted means the higher your ratio of Exact match backlinks the greater the overall site wide penalty you will receive – This results in Google forcibly decreasing your SERP (Search Engine Results Page) Rank for all terms specifically the ones that are used as backlinks as it may be seen as an attempt to manipulate search rankings

The consequences of an exact match backlink penalty extend beyond algorithmic repercussions. Google imposes penalties to enforce its guidelines, maintaining the quality of search results. Such penalties are typically applied when a website violates Google's Webmaster Guidelines or engages in manipulative practices. The fallout can lead to a significant impact on website traffic, resulting in lower search rankings, decreased organic visibility, and diminished click-through rates, especially for keywords used in backlinks.

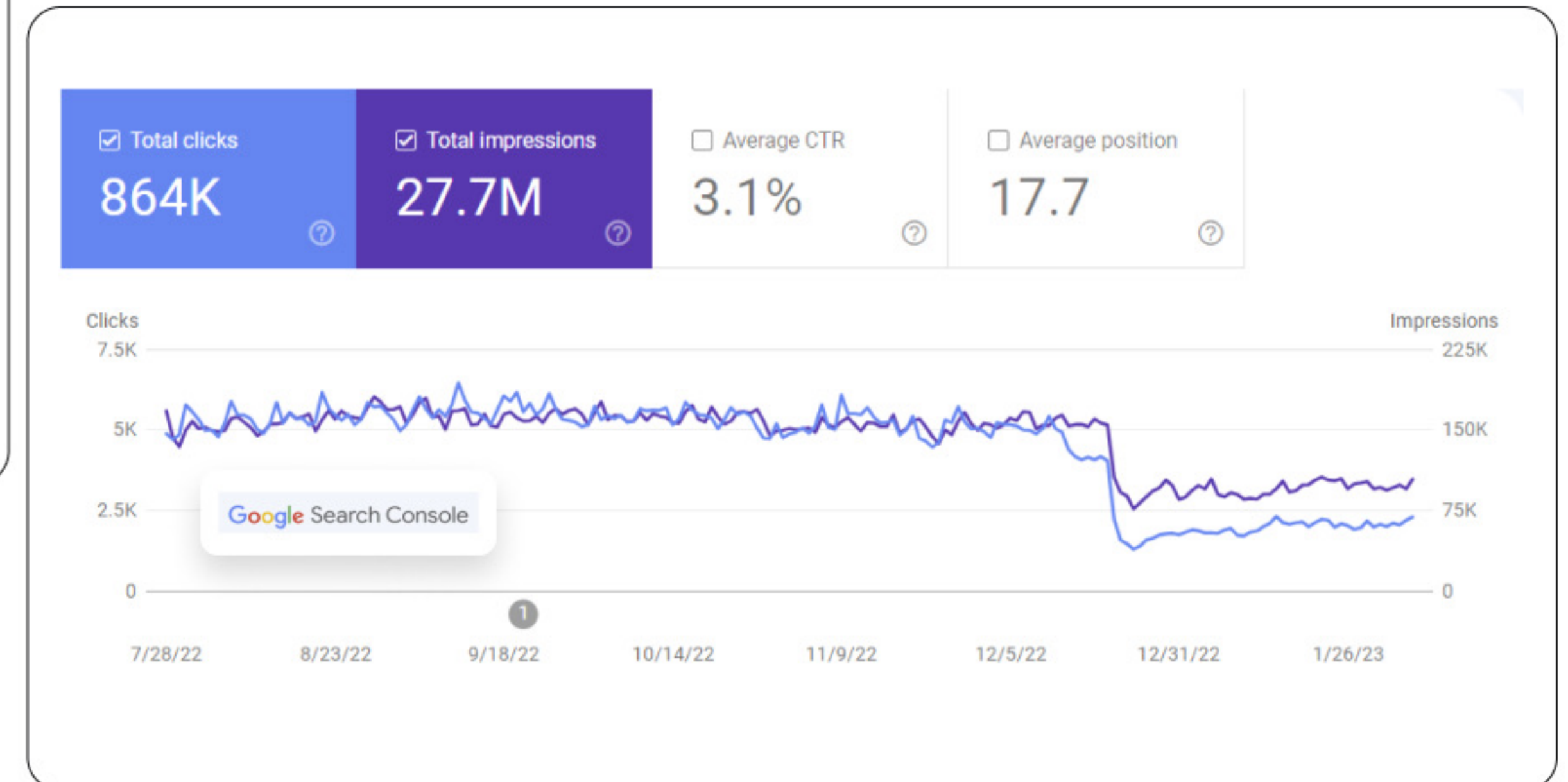
# WHAT CONDITION WAS OUR CLIENT IN AFTER A PENALTY WAS APPLIED BY GOOGLE



# Search Condition after Penalty



Massive Drop in rankings overnight



# Specifically, a **95%** click volume drop overnight

Top queries	Pre Drop Volume : Clicks	Post Drop Volume: Clicks	Click Diff	% of original Volume	% Drop	Pre Drop Volume : Position	Post Drop Volume: Position	Pos Diff
weed seeds	25 374	405	- 24 969	1,60%	98,40%	3,57	19,36	-15,79
marijuana seeds	21 428	313	- 21 115	1,46%	98,54%	3,00	29,72	-26,72
cannabis seeds	13 585	167	- 13 418	1,23%	98,77%	7,07	37,58	-30,51
marijuana seeds for sale	5 061	753	- 4 308	14,88%	85,12%	3,11	13,19	-10,08
pot seeds	4 021	404	- 3 617	10,05%	89,95%	2,44	13,24	-10,80
weed seed	3 429	43	- 3 386	1,25%	98,75%	2,78	19,99	-17,21
feminized seeds	3 139	220	- 2 919	7,01%	92,99%	5,07	26,73	-21,66
weed seeds for sale	2 104	330	- 1 774	15,68%	84,32%	3,80	12,54	-8,74
weed seeds usa	1 997	474	- 1 523	23,74%	76,26%	2,12	8,29	-6,17
autoflower seeds	1 749	811	- 938	46,37%	53,63%	7,20	15,36	-8,16
cannabis seeds for sale	1 675	369	- 1 306	22,03%	77,97%	4,98	13,23	-8,25
canabis seeds	1 398	76	- 1 322	5,44%	94,56%	5,30	20,62	-15,32
marijuana seed	1 204	46	- 1 158	3,82%	96,18%	2,61	15,81	-13,20
buy marijuana seeds	1 204	159	- 1 045	13,21%	86,79%	5,55	19,45	-13,90
where to buy marijuana seeds	1 104	124	- 980	11,23%	88,77%	2,97	12,55	-9,58
cannibis seeds	1 093	85	- 1 008	7,78%	92,22%	3,62	19,70	-16,08
marajuana seeds	1 075	-	- 1 075	0,00%	100,00%	2,89	100,00	-97,11
buy weed seeds	1 012	106	- 906	10,47%	89,53%	5,35	14,55	-9,20
cannibus seeds	1 007	16	- 991	1,59%	98,41%	2,28	34,14	-31,86
auto flower seeds	898	182	- 716	20,27%	79,73%	7,88	23,12	-15,24
cannabis seed	876	13	- 863	1,48%	98,52%	7,33	39,65	-32,32
seed bank	833	-	- 833	0,00%	100,00%	9,28	100,00	-90,72
marijuanas seed	830	84	- 746	10,12%	89,88%	1,73	7,21	-5,48
where to buy weed seeds	789	110	- 679	13,94%	86,06%	2,13	7,69	-5,56
marijuana seed bank	787	15	- 772	1,91%	98,09%	3,72	39,73	-36,01
	<b>97 672</b>	<b>5 305</b>	<b>- 92 367</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>94,57%</b>	<b>107,78</b>	<b>663,45</b>	

## Client Example

Two client sites we've worked with encountered significant setbacks stemming from mismanagement of their backlink profiles, notably characterized by an excessive number of exact match backlinks. At the time the penalty was imposed, the backlink ratio for both sites hovered around 25%, with an additional concern arising from an even higher percentage of image links lacking alt text.

### The impact of the penalty was profound, resulting in a substantial

- 70% reduction in daily clicks and impressions for both sites. This decline was not confined to specific high-value keywords but also manifested as an overall decrease in visibility across the entire sites.
- Key statistical indicators from this decline include a staggering **54% decrease in organic clicks,**
- plummeting from **435,000 in the three months preceding the penalty to a mere 197,000 in the subsequent three months.**

Furthermore, critical money terms, such as 'Weed seeds,' 'Cannabis seeds,' and related variations, experienced huge drops in rankings and clicks.

- For instance, 'Weed seeds' descended from position 4 to 23,
- accompanied by a 98% drop in clicks from 20,500 to 270.
- Similar drastic declines were observed for 'Cannabis seeds' and related terms, reflecting a severe impact on key money pages with organic clicks plummeting by over 66% and visibility (impressions) by over 75%.

# Weed seeds

## The Details TL;DL

We have looked at other businesses that saw a dip and jump in XXX seeds traffic.

Ingeniously RoyalQueenseeds has multiple languages for their ecommerce website and the links from their product pages are “no alt text” which is good cause then they won't be penalized for exact match terms – BUT from their high authority partner sites like .PL / .SE / .gr / .cat etc etc

Royalqueenseeds has **very low exact match anchor text**, But the pages that are referring their links have their main entity focus on the transaction XXXX seeds terms.

Whereas **seedsman.com** saw a massive hit twice - once at the very start of Jan, most notably relating to the algorithm update and this appears to be because of the exact match issue

The key here for backlinks are as follows

- Exact Match anchor text from sources which have added a “noFollow” to the link
- Then having DoFollow links which do not have and anchor text or use your brand name or a URL as the anchor text
- The pages you have DoFollow need to have their NLP entities matching the KWs you want top rank for
- The landing pages need to have internal links which DO utilize exact match anchor text towards the most relevant Page.

# WHAT WAS DONE TO FIX THE PENALTY

## Exact Match Program Example = Breakdown + Steps

1

### Full categorization of millions

**of backlinks** = mostly manually to ensure complete accuracy - filtering to find all Exact match queries (pulled from 2 different sources to cover all bases)

2

Identifying which of these backlinks had **low domain rating / trust flow** (scores given by the external data sources to show bad domains)

3

**Full LP scan** of the exact match backlink pages = to assess whether there was any entity (topical) match to the target pages

4

### Multi-phase disavow process

1. Tester = all low domain rating / trust flow backlinks for = Homepage + [/cheap-cannabis-seeds](#) + [/feminized-seeds](#) + [/autoflower-seeds-usa](#)
2. All remaining low domain rating / trust flow backlinks for all pages
3. All non-200 response code domains + no entity match (ensuring still low DR / TF)
4. Remaining non-entity match domains with below average DR/TF

## Steps to recovery

1/5

Dealing with an exact match penalty requires a meticulous and systematic approach. The step-by-step process we followed to undo the damage involved comprehensive analysis, categorization, and strategic disavowal:

### Backlink Data Collection

We initiated the process by conducting a full download and export of all backlinks associated with the client's website. Utilizing multiple external tools, we ensured a thorough capture of hundreds of thousands of backlinks, providing a comprehensive dataset for analysis. This exported list needed to contain a few areas of vital information for us to properly categorize: Anchor text / backlink source page / backlink source domain / target page on client website

### Categorization Effort

The next crucial step involved a meticulous categorization process. This task required a significant amount of manual effort, where each backlink was carefully examined to identify whether it was an exact match, branded, or could be temporarily ignored without contributing to the penalty issue.

As it's near impossible to manually look at every single backlink one at a time, we utilized a mix of methods to speed this process up:

1. Excel formula to identify word count for the anchor text - Allows us to rule out sentences
2. Filtering to bulk check (tick off) branded queries - using different variants of brand terms (website, acronyms, misspelled name, etc)
3. Filtering to immediately highlight those with standard queries - such as 'weed seeds' / 'cannabis seeds' / 'strain' / etc

## Steps to recovery

2/5

### In-Depth Analysis Waves

The categorized list then underwent multiple waves of analysis. We scrutinized each domain to identify those that were non-functional, broken, or had been sold. Additionally, we assessed domains based on low or no domain rating and trust flow, utilizing metrics from different external tools to ensure accuracy. We also highlighted domains that lacked Natural Language Processing (NLP) matches with the landing pages on the client's site. By doing this we were able to easily find domains that could be disavowed straight away, as they would provide no benefit to the client site, so could be culled with little additional insight needed. This allowed us to focus more on the higher quality domains, those with relevance and those domains with the largest number of backlinks to the client site.

### Initial Disavow Implementation

To test the effectiveness of our strategy, we implemented disavows on a limited scale. Specifically, we tested the disavowal process on five key pages, including the homepage. This initial phase allowed us to refine our approach before proceeding with a full rollout. To carry out this test, we chose 5 different pages from across the site, all of which were high traffic/beneficial pages which rely on money terms, and those that would be flagged in the exact match penalty.

Upon upload of this initial disavow list, we closely monitored change in visibility and average positions for key queries around these 5 pages. Once secure on the approach being correct, we moved onto creating batches of disavows for the entire site.



## Steps to recovery

3/5

### Rollout in Waves

The disavowal process was intricately structured, comprising distinct stages aimed at methodically addressing the various facets of the exact match penalty. This approach allowed us to navigate the complexities involved in disavowing backlinks and minimizing potential risks. The process unfolded as follows →

#### Initial Identification of Non-Functional Domains

The first wave of disavows focused on eliminating links from domains that were not operational (non-200 status) or had been sold. This initial cleanup ensured that the disavowal effort began with a solid foundation, removing links that were no longer relevant or contributing positively to the website's SEO.

#### Addressing Low Domain Rating and Trust Flow

Subsequent waves targeted domains with low or no domain rating and trust flow. By systematically disavowing links from these domains, we aimed to enhance the overall quality of the backlink profile. This step was critical in eliminating links that might have been contributing to the exact match penalty.

#### Eliminating Domains Lacking Topical Relevance

The final wave of disavows honed in on domains that lacked topical relevance to the content of the client's website. This step involved a careful examination of the thematic alignment between the linking domains and the client's landing pages. Disavowing links from domains with no topical relevance further refined the link profile, aligning it more closely with the client's content focus.

## Steps to recovery

4/5

### Rollout in Waves

#### **Staged Rollout for Ongoing Monitoring**

Each disavow wave was implemented in a staged manner, with careful monitoring initiated immediately after implementation. This staged rollout strategy was integral to tracking the impact of each disavow list on the website's performance. By spacing out the waves, we ensured a systematic approach, making it easier to manage and analyze the results without overwhelming the system or risking sudden and adverse impacts on traffic.

The deliberate implementation of disavows in carefully planned waves was vital to the intricate process of recovering from the exact match penalty. This phased approach was not only critical for minimizing risks associated with sudden and comprehensive disavowals but also served as a vital mechanism for meticulous monitoring and evaluation of the recovery impact.

The strategic decision to disavow in waves was driven by the need to strike a delicate balance between rectifying the penalty efficiently and avoiding potential pitfalls. By dividing the disavowal process into distinct phases, we aimed to carefully manage the impact on the website's backlink profile, ensuring a controlled and measured response.

One primary advantage of this phased approach lay in the ability to closely monitor the consequences of each disavow wave. Tracking the impact of disavows on key metrics such as search rankings, organic traffic, and user engagement allowed for real-time adjustments and refinements to the recovery strategy.

## Steps to recovery

5/5

### Continuous Performance Monitoring

Post-implementation of each disavow wave, we engaged in ongoing monitoring of the website's traffic and search engine performance. This continuous vigilance allowed us to assess the effectiveness of the disavowal strategy and make real-time adjustments if necessary. Monitoring focused on key metrics, such as changes in search rankings, organic traffic patterns, and user engagement, specifically honing in on terms affected by the exact match penalty.

By strategically segmenting the disavowal process and adopting a phased rollout strategy, we not only addressed the immediate concerns associated with the penalty but also ensured the long-term health and resilience of the website's SEO. This comprehensive and systematic approach aimed at gradually restoring the website's credibility and visibility in search engine results.

### Continuous Traffic Monitoring

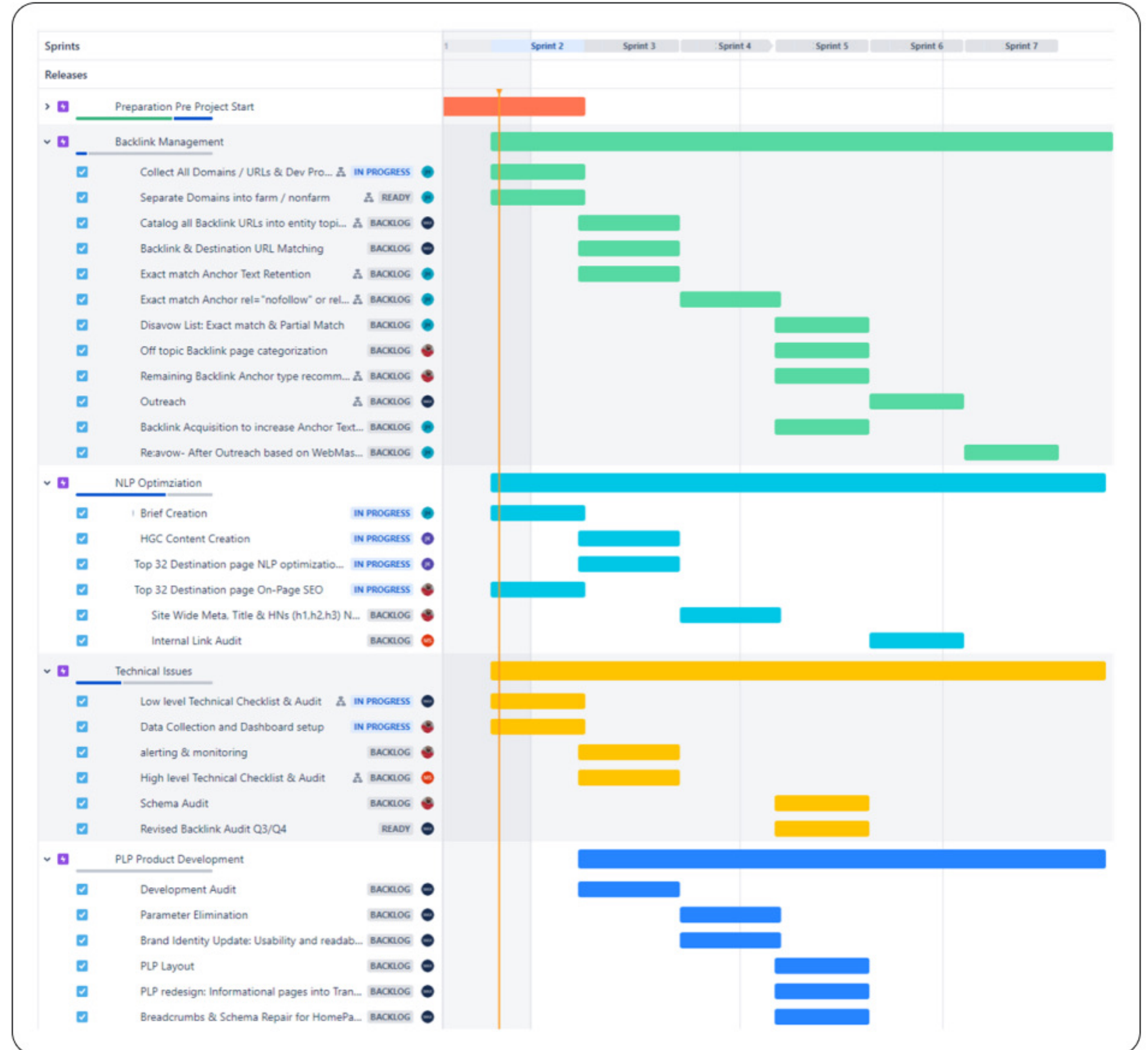
Post-implementation, we maintained a vigilant watch on the website's traffic. Our focus was specifically directed towards terms that would have been impacted by the exact match penalty. Continuous monitoring allowed us to identify any potential issues promptly and make adjustments as needed.

By meticulously following this step-by-step process, we aimed to systematically address the exact match penalty, gradually restoring the website's SEO health and ensuring sustained improvements in search engine rankings and organic traffic.

**By meticulously following this step-by-step process, we aimed to systematically address the exact match penalty, gradually restoring the website's SEO health and ensuring sustained improvements in search engine rankings and organic traffic.**

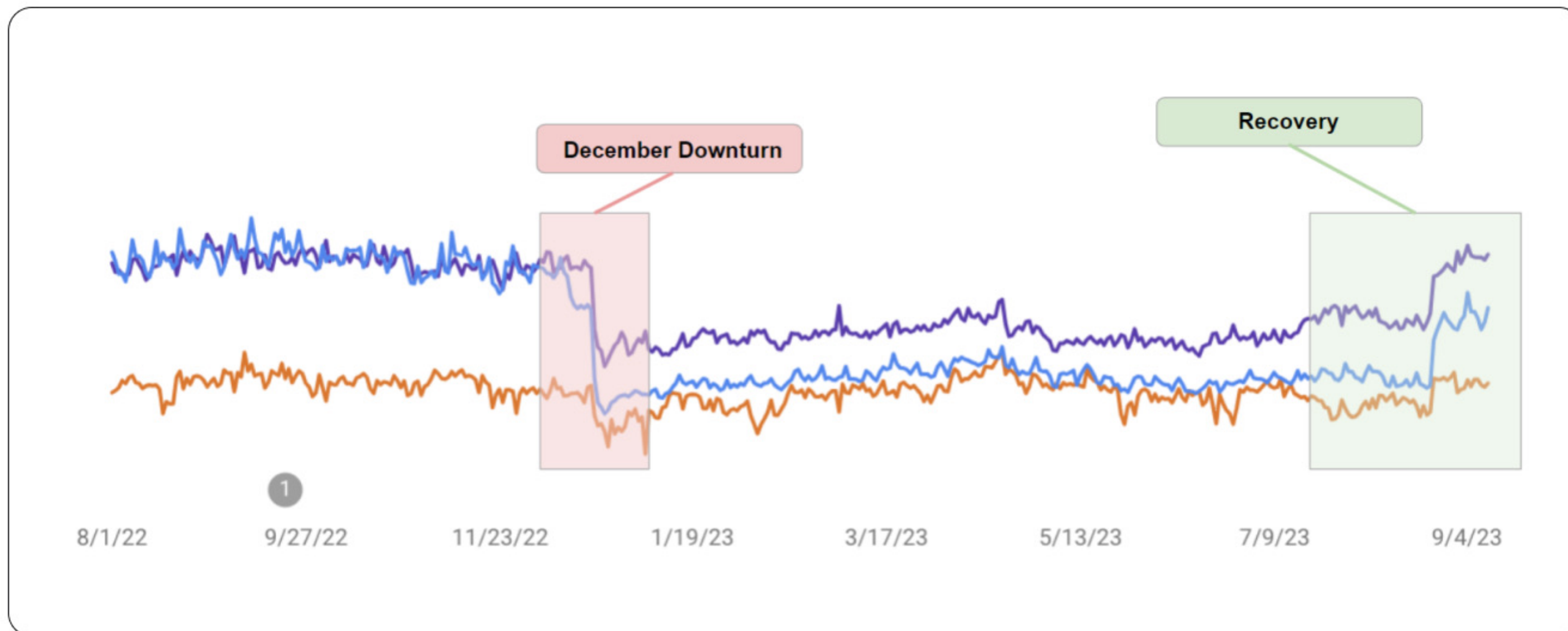
## What does an algorithm recovery look like

When developing the roadmap our team meticulously crafted key milestones, line items and deliverables to address key areas, prioritizing quick wins initially and collaborating with client-side teams to build a backlog of strategic initiatives for sustained optimization.



# RESULTS OF THE ALGORITHM RECOVERY PROGRAM

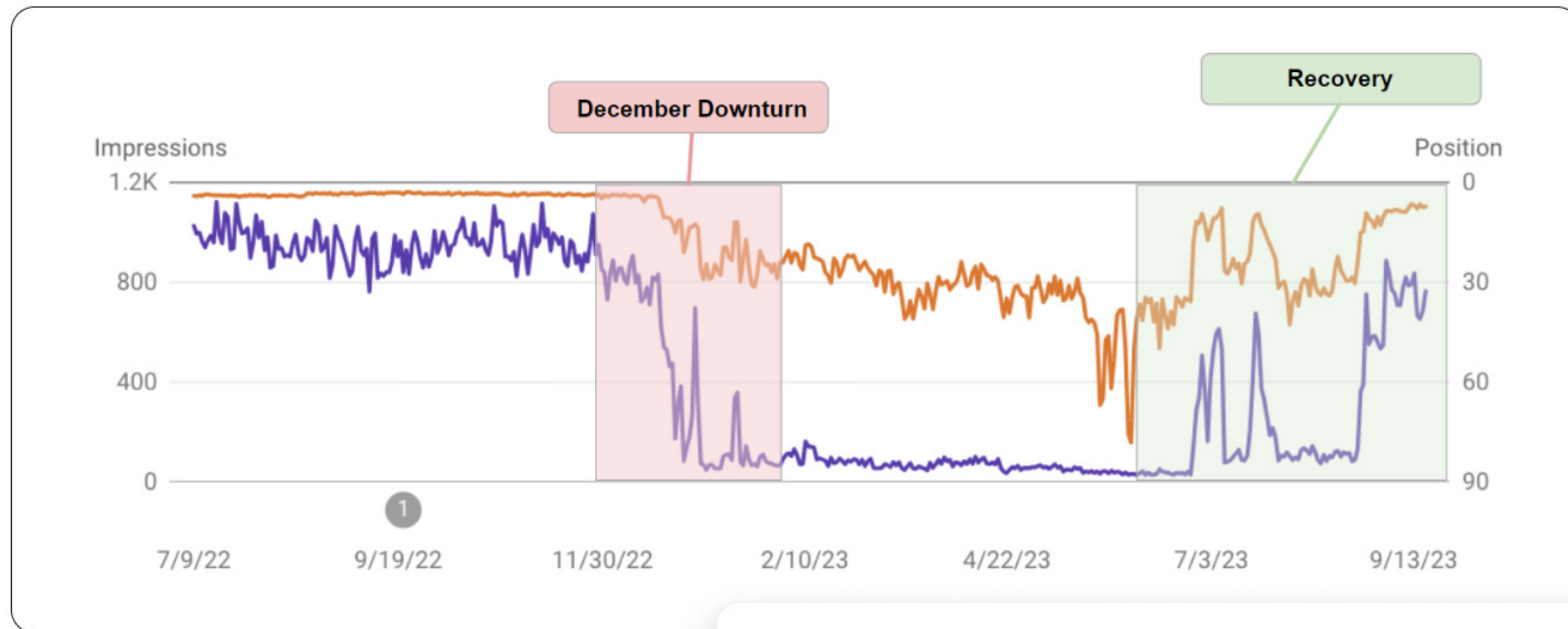
## What does an algorithm recovery look like



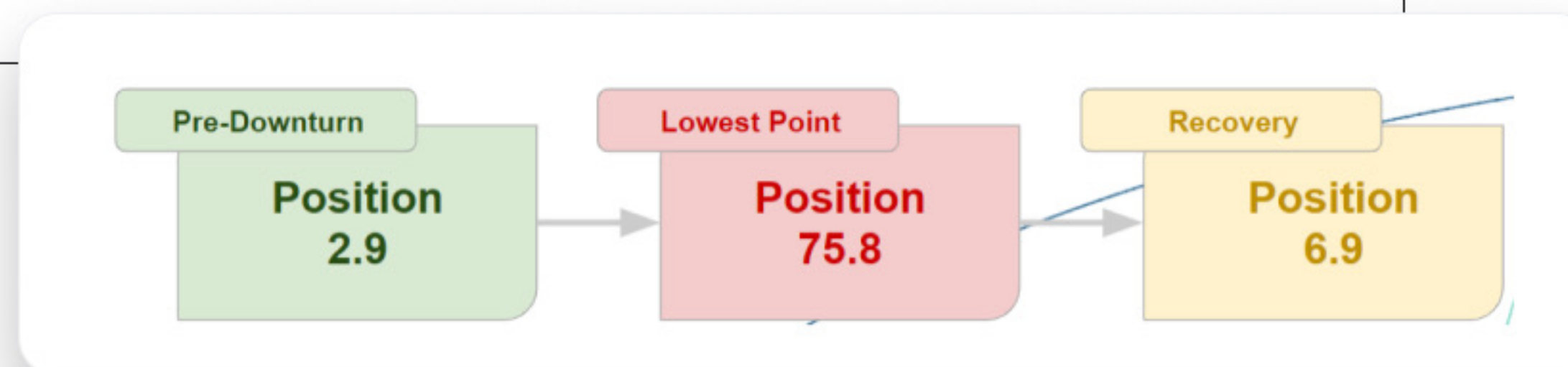
The graph highlights one of our clients initial drop, which has been attributed to the Exact Match penalty primarily.

The green shows the recovery we saw due to the implementation of the disavows. As can be seen, both impressions and average position were moving in a positive direction, which always leads to increased clicks down the line (as isn't always a quick jump from a bad position to a good one — can take movement)

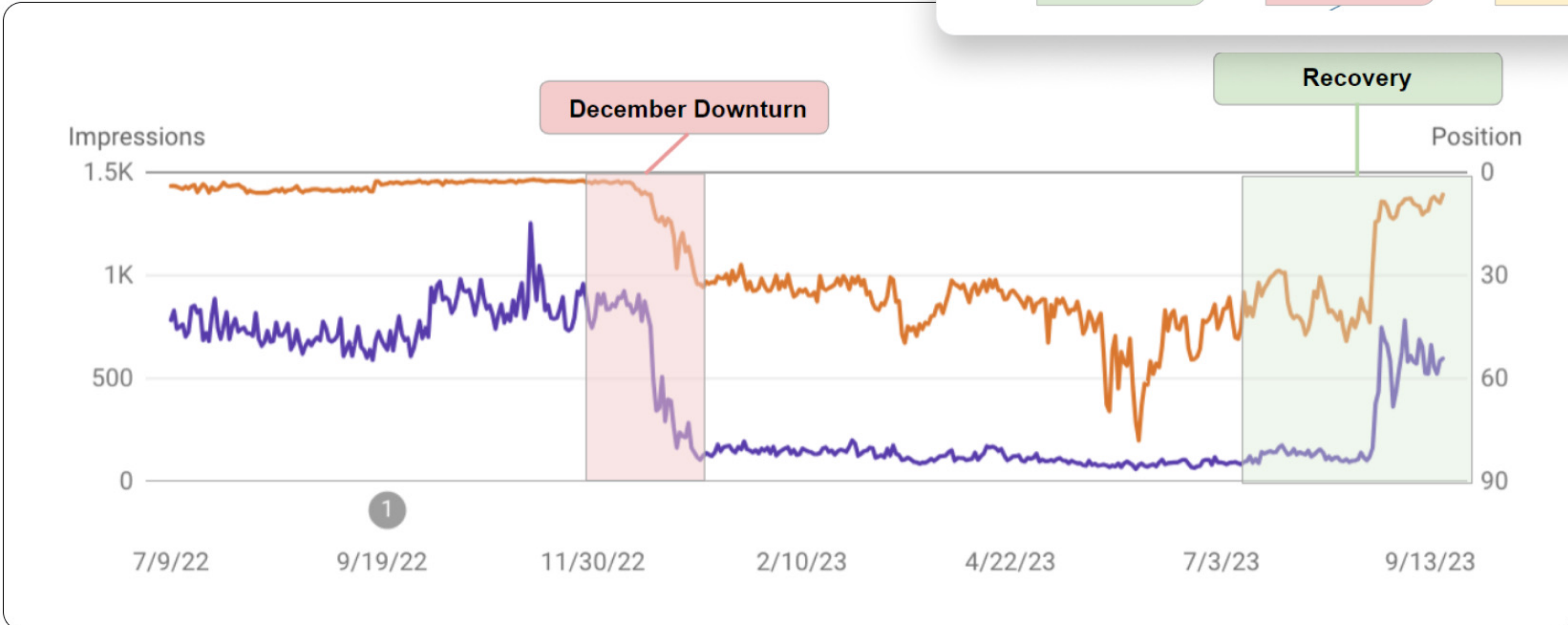
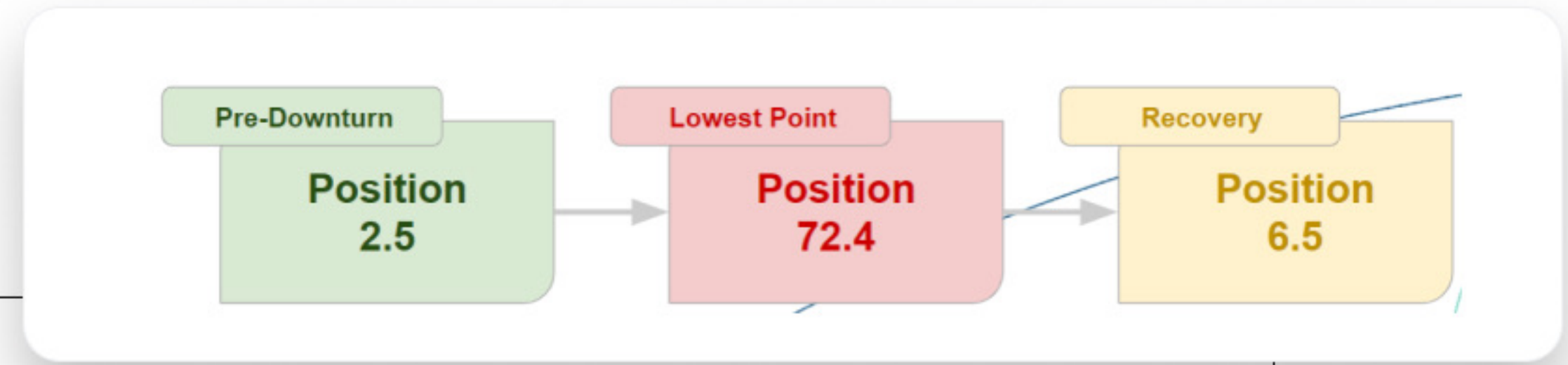
## KW specific Example: Weed Seeds



When looking at a key MONEY TERM we can see the same depreciation... This doesn't happen with all terms to the same degree but just the terms that are the highest search volume and have the largest number of exact match anchor text backlinks – Google is smart, it knows what you are doing!



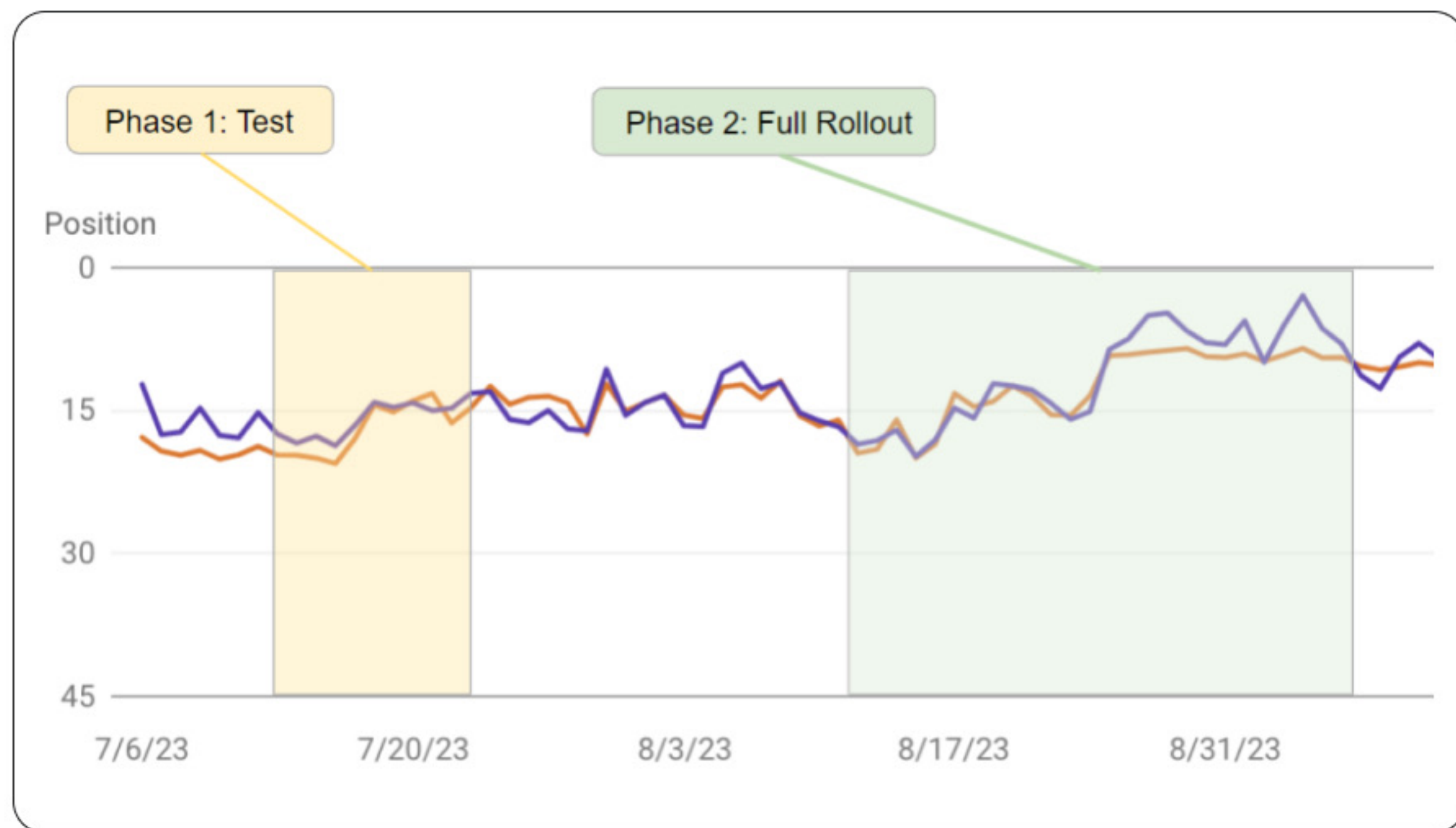
# KW specific Example: Marijuana Seeds



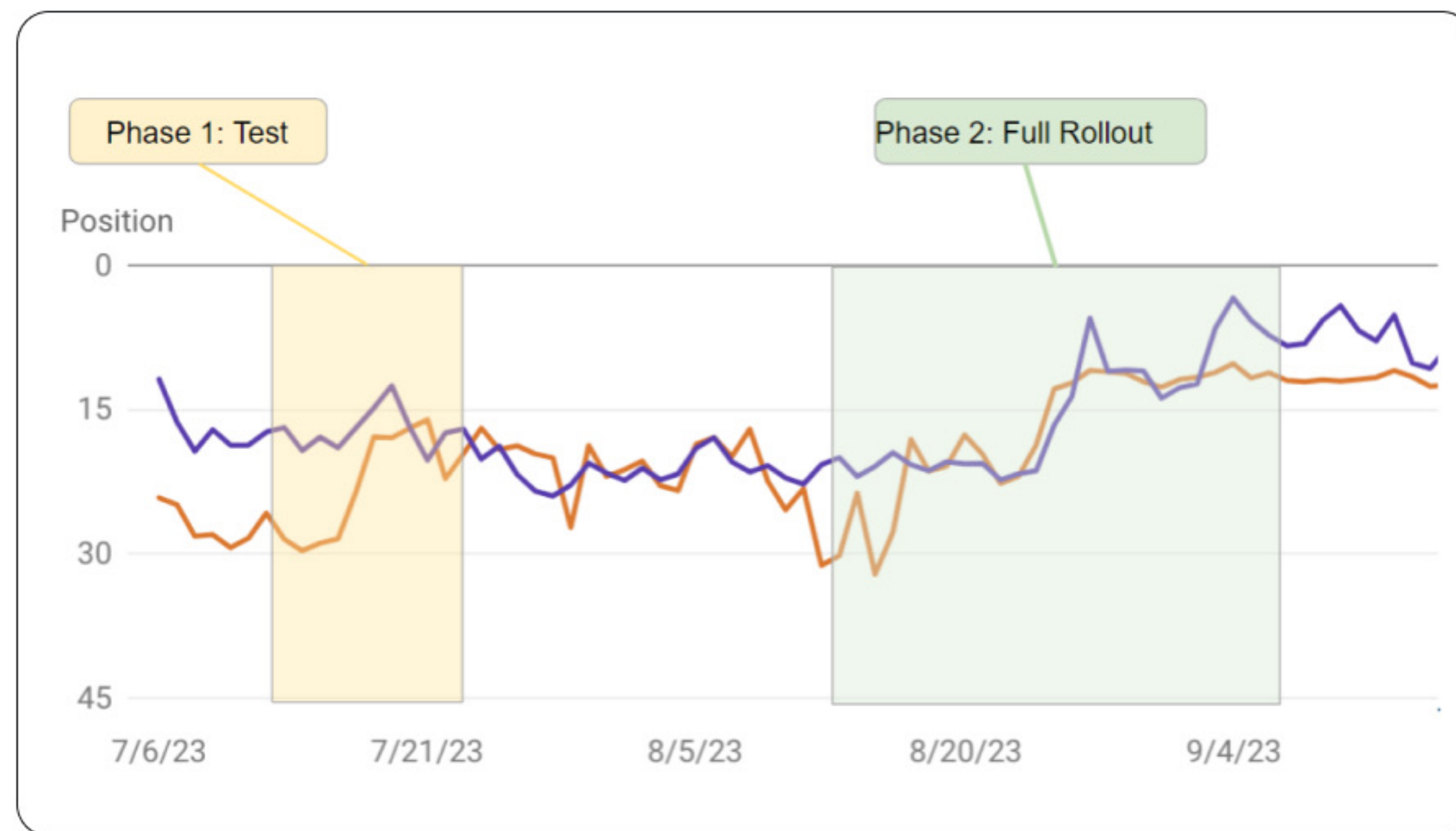


## EM Results — Last 3 Months

### Homepage



### Individual key pages



Here are the results of how the homepage recovered. This page received the MOST traffic from the most variety of exact match backlinks.

## EM Results - Prior to Main Rollout + After [Queries]

Queries	Clicks Prior	Clicks After	Pos. Prior	Pos. After
Marijuana seeds	37	181	35.4	19
Marijuana seeds for sale	66	166	17	12.8
Autoflower seeds	164	228	14.8	7.7
Cheap weed seeds	47	74	4.5	4.2
Feminized seeds	17	38	28.8	21.8
Autoflower seeds for sales	4	20	7.9	4.6
Female marijuana plant seeds	0	13	0	2.7
Cheap cannabis seeds	42	54	6.2	5.4

It's important to note that this snapshot of queries also highlights a couple of examples of queries reaching both page 1 as well as top 5 positions. Both of which are renowned for increasing traffic and being seen as highly trustworthy

## Homepage EM Results - Prior to Main Rollout + After [Queries]

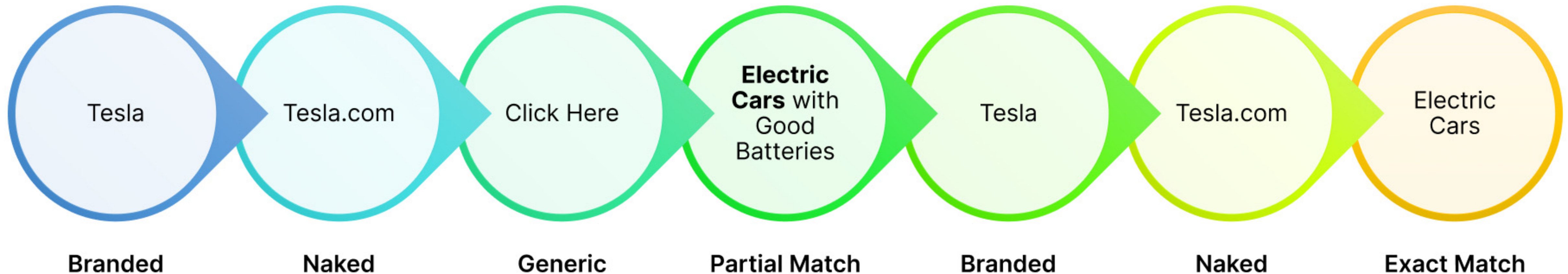
Queries	Clicks Prior	Clicks After	Pos. Pior	Pos. After
Marijuana seeds	37	179	35.8	19.3
Marijuana seeds for sale	66	166	17.2	13
Pot seeds	38	59	17	11.6
Cannabis seeds	95	115	32	27.5
Where to buy marijuana seeds	4	14	9.9	9.3
Weed seeds for sale	31	38	12.2	10
Cannabis seeds online	7	14	19.1	15.2
Weed seeds buy	1	8	4.6	3

# INSIGHTS & CHALLENGES

## What happens Once exact match penalty is removed: Re-avows are necessary

Backlink profile development continues, and this functions exactly the same as a backlink program except we work with domains linking to your site to change the exact match terms to other anchor text types

**Note** Only use exact match for your highest quality links and use extremely sparingly



## TIP

**The whole point is not creating patterns for algorithms to identify unnatural occurrence. ITS NOT just anchor text that Google identifies...**

It sees unnatural backlink implementations such as a high volume of backlinks in a single day

**In addition, instead of exact match anchors, use co-occurrence KWs**

This means using the exact match KW “near” the anchor text., this provides context to the anchored link. Eg: I found a great website that has very efficient [electric cars]

I was looking at the Tesla Website and their [electric cars] are amazing

For sponsored Links, you can use exact match terms BUT ask that the link is “noFollow” — This will actually increase your expertise rating in the EAT algorithm and will also improve your Follow noFollow ratio (10% noFollow is ideal)

## Make sure

The whole name of the game is actually to make sure the Entity salience of the backlink URL has a high salience for the terms you want to rank for

Entities are a whole other area that most SEO's are not familiar with but Entities are who google indexes sites in its Index.

## Moreover, the Source backlink and Target page have to ...

Have similar entity profiles

Have good entity anchors

Recommended to have the KW in the URL

Be internally linking to a page that is relevant OR  
The thematic Entity of the page being relevant

The page be well optimized: On Page SEO  
elements all in agreement

BE PREPARED TO DO  
A LOT OF MANUAL WORK



## Challenges

The exact match penalty recovery program presented its fair share of challenges, necessitating a strategic and meticulous approach due to the complexity of the task at hand: Lots of manual labour is required to fix this issue, such as:

### Volume of Backlinks

Dealing with a substantial number of backlinks posed a significant challenge. The sheer volume of data made the initial stages of the recovery program demanding. Thinning the data to facilitate download and export was a critical preliminary step, requiring careful consideration to ensure that no relevant information was overlooked or excluded.

### Challenges in Tracking and Monitoring

Monitoring progress posed challenges, particularly during the implementation of disavow waves alongside other recovery efforts. The intricate nature of the recovery program made it difficult to isolate and attribute changes in traffic or rankings solely to the disavowal process. This complexity required a nuanced approach to tracking and interpreting results. Alongside this, Google's on-going algorithm changes mean general site rankings can shift with updates that occur.

### As stated above, Extensive Manual Work

The categorization and analysis of backlinks demanded a substantial amount of manual effort. Sifting through a large number of links was time-consuming but indispensable to guarantee the accuracy of the categorization process. Each link had to be meticulously examined to identify its nature and relevance in the context of the client's website.

# Challenges

## Time-Consuming Disavow Waves

The implementation of disavows in carefully planned waves added a temporal dimension to the recovery process. While this phased approach was critical for minimizing risks and carefully monitoring the impact, it inevitably extended the overall duration of the recovery program. The time needed to not only create the batches of disavows, but also between each disavow list being uploaded created a longer timeline from start to finish, which meant a longer period where the site was impacted by the penalty.

## Holistic Examination of Content and Technical Aspects

Beyond the backlink focus, it remained imperative to assess and address other potential impediments to recovery. This involved a continual examination of both content and technical aspects of the website. Ensuring that no other issues were hindering recovery required ongoing attention to the broader SEO landscape.

Navigating these challenges required a multidisciplinary approach that combined technical expertise, manual scrutiny, and a nuanced understanding of SEO dynamics. The recovery program's success hinged on the ability to overcome these obstacles systematically, ultimately contributing to the restoration of the website's search engine visibility and credibility.

## Utilizing Multiple External Tools

Given the complexity of the backlink landscape, a combination of external tools was employed to conduct a precise analysis. This mix of tools was essential for obtaining a comprehensive view of the backlink profile, ensuring that the recovery strategy was informed by accurate and diverse metrics. However using a variety of tools, means you're likely to encounter a mix of results as well. This can make the process more challenging, as it's important to be as accurate as possible, and also have all data available to you. For example, to pull out all the backlinks for the client site, we used Majestic backlink and Ahrefs. Between these two tools, there was backlinks that would appear within one, but not the other.

IF YOU HAVE ANY  
QUESTIONS, PLEASE  
REACH OUT!

Contacts

[createvenue.com](https://createvenue.com)

[hello@createvenue.com](mailto:hello@createvenue.com)

