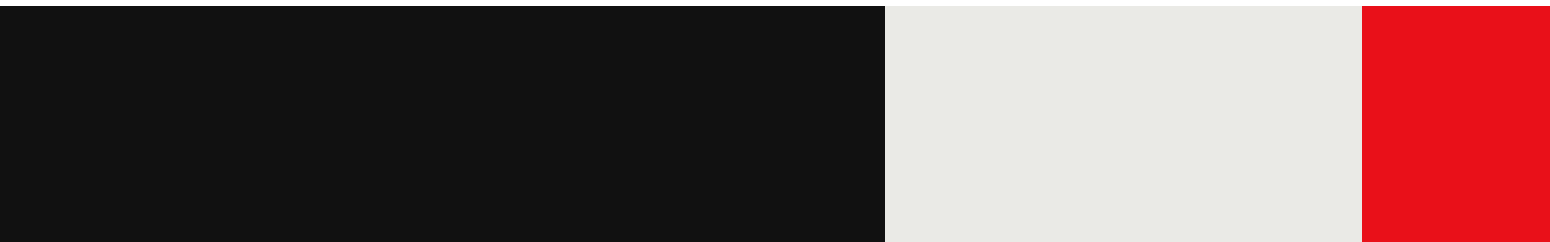



How to avoid SEO 'content goblins'

Article



Earlier this month, [a story in The Verge](#) set fire to the SEO world, describing the stereotypes of SEO professionals as “that of a hustler: a content goblin willing to eschew rules, morals, and good taste in exchange for eyeballs and mountains of cash. A nihilist in it for the thrills, a prankster gleeful about getting away with something.”

There are truths to that stereotype. “Any situation where there’s an opportunity to make a lot of money—which there totally is and has been with SEO, and it’s been the wild west before, it’s been the Gold Rush before—people will exploit it,” said Lily Ray, senior director of SEO and head of organic research at Amsive Digital, who was interviewed in the Verge story.

But there are ways to avoid these “content goblins” in favor of good, helpful SEO professionals.

Why are good SEO practices so important right now? With the advent of ChatGPT, Google Search Generative Experience (SGE), and search habits shifting toward Amazon and TikTok, SEO has once again entered the wild west, said Wil Reynolds, vice president of innovation at Seer Interactive.

“The value of SEO is diminishing,” said Reynolds. “It doesn’t mean that it’s zero. But it’s not what it was five years ago.” That means brands should work with SEO professionals who think beyond driving the next click and instead about the brand’s longevity, especially as the places people search for that brand change.

Red flags: Those bad actors who “ruined the internet” as suggested in the Verge article do exist, and your brand should avoid them.

Ray suggests watching out for:

- Guarantees about rankings
- Guarantees about revenues they can drive
- Link building, which is generally against Google’s guidelines unless it’s organic PR
- Using AI tools to replace human work—AI is not entirely bad from an SEO perspective, but automatic, rapid creation of content can hurt rankings

SEO professionals should also avoid practices that are generally bad for the internet, Ray said. These include:

- Reputation management for problematic figures
- Political misinformation
- Poor medical advice

Green flags: Good SEO professionals focus on people, value, and brand-building, not just rankings, algorithms, and links, said Reynolds. “You can’t just do the latest, greatest trick to help [websites] rank in Google because they’ve got to do that balance between what Google wants, what people want, and where the brand is trying to go.”

Reynolds also harped on how SEO professionals need to be forward-thinking, especially as generative AI and chat-based search gain footholds. Good SEO professionals should be focusing on how SGE will alter clients' ROI and playing around to figure out how to work with the new tool.

Ray said good SEO professionals tend to follow Google's guidelines. "We've been in the game long enough to understand that not doing that or trying to go against them can and will get you in trouble. It's just a matter of time."

Before working with an SEO professional, Ray suggested asking for case studies of previous work and making sure their past work has not received manual actions or penalties.

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