

Google Webmaster Tools

Google Webmaster Tools is indispensable for SEO experts and contains many powerful facilities. We'll look at the main tools below:

1. **Sitemap Submission Tool**

Allows you to point Google at your xml sitemap and instruct it to read it. You can also test whether your sitemap is valid using this tool.

2. **Crawl rate tool**

Google decides how often to crawl your site. Using this tool you can ask Google to spider your site a bit faster – very handy for websites that are frequently updated

3. **Crawl Errors monitor**

This will let you know if Google cannot access any pages of your site for any reason. If your website has been unreachable or some problem with the site itself, CEM will let you know.

4. **Search Queries Tool**

This lets you know which search queries your site appears in (whether it was clicked on or not) and also lets you know how many searches for that query appeared in the time period. This is information that is not available anywhere else (not even in Google analytics – see chapter 5)

5. **Mobile Usability Checker**

A relatively new tool in the box. Since Google started using mobile compatibility as a ranking signal, the mobile usability tool is a very useful bit of kit, especially when you have lots of websites that you need to keep track of.

6. **Backlinks Tool**

This will give you a sample of links to your site, and what page is linked to and what text is used.

7. **HTML Improvement tool**

Really handy, will show you which pages are missing title tags, meta description tags and has meta descriptions that are outside the optimal length. You can also use this to identify duplicate title and meta description tags.

8. **Remove URLs tool**

You can use the remove urls tool to remove a web page from the SERPs for any reason.

9. **Change of Address Tool**

Instead of losing all that link juice from an old url, you can issue a change of address request and get that link juice redirected. Just like mail redirection at the post office except it's free.

10. Broken Links tool

Of course you don't have any broken links, this tool is for other people who don't regularly check links like you do meticulously every day.

11. Page Speed Insights

Does exactly what it says on the tin – lets you know which pages load slowly and gives suggestions how to fix them. It has been recently updated to show mobile and desktop versions separately. Even better, it automatically creates optimised versions of your, images, JavaScript and CSS resources saving you time and effort doing this. Just download the optimised versions and upload to your site.

There are lots of other tools for specialised tasks, and Google frequently add and change the tools available. It's worth checking GWT at least every few weeks. It's free and very handy so there's no reason not to.

Disavow Bad Links

Before the Penguin came (the update I mean, not batman's enemy), Google ignored spammy and low quality links when calculating your page rankings. After the update, it included this data when calculating your site's quality. Spammers, Hackers and Black Hat SEO'ers rejoiced as this meant that negative SEO was much easier (see chapter 7 for more info on negative SEO).

Effectively, to downgrade a competitor's website, all you needed to do was create automated spammy links back to their site. Similar to the old way of generating higher rankings from automated links, the same methods were then employed. This is one example of where white hat SEO turns Black Hat.

In response to this danger, Google created a tool in GWT to 'disavow' such spammy back links. Once a site owner disavows a spammy link, Google then treats that backlink as if it didn't exist.

To disavow links you have to log into your Google webmaster tools account (you do have one don't you?) and then follow this procedure:

1. Click on the affected site.
2. Click 'search traffic' on the dashboard
3. Click 'links to your site'
4. Under 'who links the most' click 'more'
5. Click 'download more sample links' or 'download latest links' if the spam links are recent.
6. Copy the spam links from this file into a .txt file
7. If you want to exclude a whole domain insert 'domain:www.spammydomain.com'
8. Go to the 'disavow links tool page' (<https://www.Google.com/webmasters/tools/disavow-links-main>)
9. Select your website from the drop down
10. Click 'disavow links' and select your txt file to upload

It should take a few days to Google to process the file, and in some cases can take several weeks for large numbers of links.