CASE STUDY · BACKLINK RISK CLEANUP

Cleaning 4,000+ Spam Domains Across a Site Network

A publisher running four sports-history websites had thousands of spam domains pointing at its two biggest sites. In one day, every link was reviewed, a disavow file was built and submitted, and the full network was checked.

4,093
spam domains disavowed across two sites

HIGH → LOW
Semrush toxic score on both main sites

48% → 0%
toxic referring domains on the worst-affected site

4 sites
audited in one network, in one day

Client
Sports content publisher (anonymized)

Period
Sep 21 – 22, 2024

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RESULTS

Two high-risk sites, two clean sister sites

Both main sites had large, aging backlink profiles full of scraper, spam and link-network domains. Toxic candidates flagged by Semrush were reviewed, then a domain-level disavow file was built for each site and uploaded to Google Search Console.

Metric	Site A before	Site A after	Site B before	Site B after
Semrush toxic score	HIGH	LOW	HIGH	LOW
Toxic referring domains	30% (1,067)	0%	48% (2,619)	0%
Potentially toxic domains	26% (931)	0%	16% (888)	0%
Non-toxic domains	44%	100%	36%	100%
Disavowed in Search Console	1,250 domains + 1,080 URLs		2,843 domains + 867 URLs	

Sister sites C and D were also audited: 25 and 23 referring domains, 100% non-toxic, so no disavow was needed.

How the work was done

1. Audit

Full backlink audit of all four domains: 14.4K and 20.8K backlinks on the two main sites.

2. Manual review

Flagged domains were checked by hand, so genuine links stayed and only spam and link-network domains went into the file.

3. Disavow file

Domain-level rules where a whole site was spam, URL-level rules where only one page was the problem.

4. Upload and verify

Files uploaded to Search Console and a fresh Semrush audit run the next day to confirm the result.

What this does, and what it doesn't

Disavowing tells Google to ignore the listed links; it does not delete them from the web. The "after" figures show the risky links are now excluded from the profile, not that they disappeared. Google treats disavow as an advanced tool, which is why every domain was reviewed by hand instead of uploading the automated list.

Client and domain names withheld. Figures from Semrush Backlink Audit (Sep 21 and 22, 2024) and Google Search Console.