

# CNET Content Pruning Project - Q3 2023

August 2, 2023

## **What's happening?**

CNET periodically undergoes “content pruning,” a strategic initiative aimed at maintaining and improving CNET’s domain authority and user experience.

## **What is content pruning and why does it matter?**

Content pruning removes, redirects, or refreshes URLs that are no longer relevant or helpful to our audience, including outdated or redundant content that may confuse or frustrate users looking for up-to-date information. (For example, a 1996 article about available AOL service tiers is no longer relevant or useful.)

Also called content deprecation, it sends a signal to Google that says CNET is fresh, relevant and worthy of being placed higher than our competitors in search results.

## **How do we decide which content gets pruned from the site?**

Removing content from the site is not a decision we take lightly. Our teams analyze many data points to determine whether there are pages on CNET that are not currently serving a meaningful audience. These metrics include page views, backlink profiles and the amount of time that has passed since the last update.

By correlating these metrics with each page, we can gain a clearer understanding of their overall impact on our site's performance and choose whether to redirect, repurpose or remove (deprecate) these pages.

## **What is the benefit of this approach?**

Ultimately, the effort will improve SEO rankings and drive more meaningful user engagement.

## **Does this affect video URLs?**

As of August, video content has not been pruned and is under evaluation.

## Have we gone through this process previously? How often will this happen in the future?

This process is not new to CNET. Going forward, we will likely engage in content pruning at least once a year as part of site maintenance. Future initiatives will be smaller in terms of the number of pages affected.

## Do other sites and competitors engage in content pruning?

Yes, this is an industry-wide best practice for large sites like ours that are primarily driven by SEO traffic. Below we've included additional industry materials on Content Pruning:

- [Search Engine Journal: How & Why Content Pruning Helps Your SEO](#) (a particularly helpful starting point!)
- [Search Engine Journal: WTF is Thin Content?](#)
- [Yoast: SEO Basics - What is Content Pruning](#)

## What is our methodology?

The first step in this approach involves collecting data points for each URL flagged as deprecation candidates. These include SEO entries, the age of the story, traffic to the story, length of story, whether Google is frequently crawling the story and whether or not the story had any inbound links with a DA over 40.

## What are the outcomes once a URL is deemed a fit for being pruned?

If a URL is determined to be part of content pruning, a decision is made to either redirect, refresh, or deprecate the URL.

1. **When to redirect:** when an article has a direct relationship to another higher performing article and redirecting the content still serves the original intent. A user would still find the topics directly related to one another.
2. **When to refresh:** there are aspects of the article that are still hyper relevant today, providing an opportunity to take some of that content and either integrate into another piece or rewrite the current piece with new information.
3. **When to deprecate:** there are no direct topical relationships to anything else we currently focus on, the value of the news/topic when the article was created is not transferable to today, or the category/topical focus no longer supports broader objectives.

### **What is our internal process and how will I be notified if my content is affected?**

To ensure a smooth, transparent process going forward, we are establishing a review process that includes the following steps:

- Once deprecation candidates are identified, a list of URLs will be delivered to our edit team.
- Any current staffer who would see bylines deprecated will be alerted at least 10 days ahead of time.
- Any other considerations from Editorial should be flagged (e.g. a story has particular historical significance) for further review and discussion.
- Articles set to be deprecated will be sent to the Internet Archive / Wayback Machine. We will do a bulk send to the Internet Archive using the Wayback Machine API.

### **How can I access deprecated content?**

Since a number of stories have been deprecated, we are introducing a process to review past removal. We will evaluate a list of recently deprecated stories and share with authors so that past work can be pulled from our internal archives.

### **Who is affected by these changes?**

Any individual with bylines affected by prior or future content pruning initiatives will be contacted 1:1. For additional questions, please reach out to your manager.