

PRESS RELEASE

Google's new spam policy on the back button: the industry needs differentiation, not a blanket ban

KUPONA GmbH calls for a clear distinction between abusive hijacking and consent-based user communication - and warns of consequences for the entire e-commerce and martech ecosystem

Fulda, Germany, April 2026. On 13 April 2026, Google announced that it will begin enforcing its updated spam policy on so-called "back button hijacking" as of 15 June 2026. Websites that manipulate the browser's back button will face manual penalties and automatic ranking demotions in Google's search results. Fulda-based performance marketing and technology company KUPONA GmbH welcomes Google's intent to protect users from manipulative navigation, but warns that the policy's blanket wording places legitimate, consent-based technologies under general suspicion and strips an entire industry of its room to operate.

Protect users, yes - but with precision

KUPONA shares Google's ambition to shield users from manipulative navigation. What the company criticises is the missing distinction between technologies that deceive users and those that, with their explicit consent, deliver real value.

Google's definition captures every technology that uses the back button to display content - regardless of whether the user has consented, whether they remain within the same shop environment, or whether the content shown is relevant to them. As a result, fraudulent hijacking that redirects users to spam or third-party sites is lumped together with consent-based, on-site user communication under the same "spam" label.

*"We support Google's goal of protecting users from manipulative practices. But a policy that fails to distinguish between deception and value ends up hitting the wrong targets", says **Hendrik Seifert, Managing Director of KUPONA GmbH.** "A significant number of e-commerce and performance marketing providers deploy back-button-based technologies - consent-based, privacy-compliant, and with measurable value for end customers. Treating these the same as fraudulent redirects to third-party sites is disproportionate."*

A real-world example: consent-based product recommendations, not spam

With ReBounce, KUPONA operates a conversion recovery tool that uses the back button to show visitors of an online shop personalised product recommendations drawn from the same shop's own catalogue. The recommendation page sits on a subdomain of the merchant, follows the merchant's corporate design, and is only activated after the user has given explicit consent via the merchant's Consent Management Platform (CMP). The user is neither redirected nor trapped - a second click on the back button returns them immediately to the previous page, including the Google search results.

The concrete differences from abusive hijacking:

- The user remains on the merchant's domain (subdomain) - no redirects to external or unknown third-party sites
- Only products from the same shop's catalogue are displayed - no third-party advertising
- Activation requires explicit user consent via the merchant's CMP
- Back-navigation remains unrestricted at all times
- A direct contractual relationship with each merchant, including GDPR-compliant data processing - no hidden script injection

*"Technically speaking, we use the same browser API as the spam practices Google describes - but the context could not be more different", says **Patrick Feucht, Managing Director Technology & Creation at KUPONA**. "The user stays in the shop, sees relevant products instead of spam, and can go back with a single click at any time. There is no trap, no deception, no external redirect. This is not hijacking - this is consent-based user communication."*

Measurable results and the scale of the problem

To put the scope of the policy into perspective, it helps to look at the baseline: in e-commerce, between 40 and 60 percent of all shop visitors leave without taking any further action - they bounce. On mobile devices, which account for more than 60 percent of traffic for most shops, this rate is often even higher. On mobile, the back button is one of the few reliable signals for exit intent - alternatives such as mouse movements or cursor exit events simply do not exist there.

Technologies that use this signal therefore do not address a niche, but by far the largest lever in the e-commerce funnel. A blanket ban would deprive merchants of the ability to respond to the majority of their lost visitors at all.

KUPONA's own data shows that this response works. Across three years and several hundred merchants - including well-known, pan-European brands - the company records click-through rates of up to 40 percent on the recommendation pages. Between 55 and 70 percent of interacting users convert within the first hour. According to KUPONA, there have been no user complaints during this period.

"We are talking about 40 to 60 percent of total shop traffic that is simply lost without these technologies - especially on mobile, where there is no alternative to the back button as an exit signal", says Feucht. "If 40 percent of those users voluntarily engage with the recommendations, and a large share of them convert within an hour, that is not spam - that is a functioning user experience."

Economic implications for the industry

The implications of the policy reach far beyond individual providers. Back-button-based technologies have established themselves as a distinct product category in e-commerce. A wide range of market players - from exit-intent tools to engagement platforms and conversion recovery solutions - generate significant revenue through such mechanics.

"This is not about protecting a single business model, but about whether Google, with a broadly worded policy, is indirectly classifying an entire product category as malicious", Seifert says.

Google's dual role: regulator and economic beneficiary

When assessing this policy, KUPONA believes a structural conflict of interest has to be taken into account: in this constellation, Google acts simultaneously as the regulator that sets the rules, as the judge that sanctions violations, and as an economic actor that benefits from enforcement.

Every user who stays in a shop through a consent-based product recommendation and converts there does not return to Google's search results - and generates no further ad click there. Technologies like ReBounce create value within the shop that would otherwise occur inside the Google ecosystem. The fact that precisely these technologies are now being classified as spam across the board raises questions.

"In this case, Google is rule-setter and market participant at the same time", Seifert says. "That is not an accusation of bad intent - but it is a constellation that calls for transparency and a differentiated debate. Anyone who writes the rules for a market in which they are themselves the biggest beneficiary must be held to particularly high standards."

The call: clear criteria for a fair assessment

KUPONA issues a constructive appeal to Google to refine the policy before it takes effect on 15 June 2026 and to clearly distinguish between abusive and legitimate use cases. The company specifically proposes to include the following criteria in any assessment:

- Is there explicit user consent?
- Does the user remain within the same shop or domain environment?
- Is back-navigation unrestricted at all times?
- Is the content shown contextually relevant to the user?
- Is there a transparent, contractual relationship between the website operator and the technology provider?

The company stresses that, regardless of how this debate unfolds, it is already working on technical adjustments to make ReBounce future-proof. KUPONA has also reached out directly to Google's Search Quality team to seek clarification as to whether consent-based, on-site use cases fall under the new policy.

"Innovation must not be placed under general suspicion", Seifert says. "We need a conversation about which criteria make for a fair assessment - in the interest of users, but also of the many serious market participants whose business models are built on this technology."

KUPONA GmbH is a performance marketing agency and technology provider headquartered in Fulda, Germany. Since 2004, the company has supported e-commerce clients with data-driven marketing solutions across all relevant channels - from programmatic advertising and social media to SEA and affiliate marketing, as well as proprietary SaaS products. With ReBounce, KUPONA operates one of the leading conversion recovery platforms in the German-speaking market, currently deployed across several hundred online merchants.

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