

GOOGLE SERPS: CONSISTENT, REPEATABLE . . YOU MUST BE JOKING

One of the key measures of your web site performance is its ranking in SERPS, the Search Engines Results Page. This is the measure that everyone looks at first. The logic is that the higher you are, the more people will click through to your site and the more business you will get. Sounds perfectly reasonable especially as calculating your position doesn't require special software. Enter your keyword in Google and count down the entries until you get to your site. Simple and everyone can immediately see you are #1 and you can bask in glory for the rest of that day.

But what if the SERPS reading you are getting from your computer is different to the SERPS reading on a second computer? In other words you are reporting position #1 to your boss and he looks on his computer and sees you ranked at #15. Not possible you say, but it is.

Or another scenario. You have just spent a heap of time optimising your site possibly to overcome a down rating as a result of the recent changes to Google's algorithm. You leave it to bed in and come into the office bright-eyed and bushy tailed on Monday morning to find that your ranking has gone down . . . not up. Not possible you say, but it is.

So why is it possible to get varying SERPS results? There could be three reasons.

The first reason is relevance. A site's position is influenced by your own activity on that site. Google thinks that because you look at a site frequently it is important to you and it should be ranked rank higher. QED.

Of course your colleague may not share your enthusiasm for this site, Google will rank it lower and it will not appear as high in SERPS (the one sure way to break out of this circle is to clear out your cookie file before you start a search but this requires discipline and remembering to do it).

A second reason why this can happen is a combination of relevance and the limits of technology. It has long been known that you can get different results depending on which country you are in. Hosting a site abroad has always made it more diffi-

cult to achieve a high SERPS ranking. The reason appears to lie in the data center which is processing your search query and the fact that it takes time to populate the various data centres around the world. This will produce different SERPS results in different countries.

The third reason is also about technology and relevance. As search traffic increases more and more servers are needed and you can now conduct searches on different data centres from within countries as well. The results you get from Town A may well be different from the same search conducted from Town B. If you follow the technical argument it's all about capacity; if you follow the relevance argument it's all about presenting results from sites nearer to you and thus, according to Google, of greater importance. Either results in two potentially different sets of SERPS results.

So what is needed is a way to get consistent, repeatable results wherever you are. There are various technological methods available using proxy servers or making sure you use the same data center each time but I am assuming I am talking to marketers here and life is not long enough to upskill in all these disciplines.

The best solution therefore appears to be to use some form of Ranking Monitor software. These will log in to same data center each time hopefully preventing the inconsistencies. Fortunately there are many commercial ones available often within web site management software packages and there are standalone versions and even one hidden deep in the bowels of Google itself.

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