

SEO Questions – Why do I see different Google results than my clients?

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By Rob Sullivan

Having been in this industry for as long as I have, I often forget some of the basics. Well, it's not that

I

forget, it's just that I assume that everyone else in the industry has the same knowledge level as I do.

So when I get a "newbie" asking a question like "Why are my Google results different than my clients" I have to

take a step back and realize that we aren't all equal.

Therefore in this article I'm going to answer this one seemingly simple question. While it may be simple to

those of us "in the know" this isn't always the case with others.

One of the scariest things you can do as a new SEO is talk to a client. That's because you are always worried

that they are going to ask you a question that's over your head. And while you can fake your way through some

questions when you are new, there are some that just stump you.

Of course even the greenest of most SEO's usually know more than their clients so you don't often have to fake

an answer. Of course I would never advocate faking it. When I don't know, I've found the best thing you can

say is "I don't know, let me find out and I'll get back to you."

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And that's just what happened the other day. A new person came to me and said "I had a client who saw different

Google results than I did, and I didn't know what to tell them."

So let me give you the answer I gave him.

Google, like all the other engines, is comprised of literally tens of thousands of servers. Each server is part

of a larger cluster of computers. Each cluster forms part of a datacenter. Each datacenter then acts as an

independent branch of Google.

These datacenters are found all over the US. For the longest time Google only had about 13 data centers that

served all the results to the world. Now the number is estimated at around 80.

While some of these data centers are used for pre-testing results (for example, testing a new algorithm out

before moving it to the main data centers) most are used just to deal with the load that Google receives every

day.

These data centers are dispersed throughout the US in geographically specific areas. They have done this so

that queries are served to the data center nearest to the user.

For example, while there are a large number of data centers on the eastern coast, a person searching from San

Francisco will likely be served their search results from a data center near them, such as an Oregon or

California data center.

It is because of the differences in these data centers that someone searching in New York will see different

results than someone in Los Angeles.

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It is reasonable to think that each data center acts somewhat independently of the others. That means that their

update schedules are different as are their crawling schedules. One can even assume that the algorithm changes

which affect the index happen at different times as well.

This accounts for why there are differences in search results. Because of Google's perpetually updating index,

the results you see near you may be similar to results in other data centers but ultimately different.

This could be due to how the crawlers retrieve sites – a crawler may find a site closer to it more easily and

therefore add it to the index sooner than a geographically far away crawler would find the same site.

For example, a site in Vancouver, Canada may appear in the California data center days before the eastern data

centers. Because this site would be added to the west data center sooner, it will have an impact on the search

results returned sooner.

Consider it like the ripples you see in the water when you drop a rock into a pond. If you drop just one rock,

you see the ripples move out from where you dropped it. However, if you drop 2 rocks close to each other and at

slightly different times you see how the ripples interact with each other when they meet.

The index changes reflect this type of interaction. One site can have a subtle but noticeable effect on the

index. Yet the effects aren't noticed across all data centers at the same time. We can also see the changes in

the index grow over time, so that one Vancouver site's effect grows over time, but the effect is different across the data centers because changes happening with other sites also has an impact.

As you can see, this is why you will see different results across the data centers. It's not necessarily

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because of one single event. Like SEO itself, it's a culmination of smaller events which causes the noticeable

differences.

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Alert marketing – Get Google search results by e-mail

By Jakob Jelling

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Sometimes our jobs as marketers means we need to look beyond the obvious. Google, for example, offers their Google Alerts service. At first glance, this may seem most useful to companies who want to track certain searches within their industry, or to hobbyists who want to stay on top of changes in their topics of interest.

But Internet marketers can also use Google Alerts to help keep track of what's going on around the net, and even to keep tabs on their direct competition for that matter. Google Alerts, which are email notifications, can be created based on the top 10 Google news stories, but more helpful to marketers is the possibility of creating alerts for the top 20 Google web search results.

By setting up alerts for your competitor's company, web site, brand, or product name, you can monitor search results for changes. Some results may indicate a new product launch, or perhaps a publicity campaign, and you will be able to make appropriate adjustments in your own business.

If you want to market an affiliate product through SEO, you can monitor the top 20 results for a search on that product. You will know if and when your site breaks into the top 20 results, and can watch it as it hopefully continues climbing to that first position.

There are other uses as well. SEO firms can monitor clients' results. Niche marketers can easily monitor both industry news and niche search results. You can even monitor search results for your best keywords and your own high ranking pages.

Google Alerts, though free, can provide valuable marketing intelligence to online entrepreneurs who take advantage of it.

Jakob Jelling is the founder of <http://www.sitetube.com>. Visit his website for the latest on planning, building, promoting and maintaining websites.

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