

## Paying Homage to the False Google God

By Jeff Davidson

Fifteen years ago, even 10 years ago, did you ever imagine, in your wildest dreams, that you would devote so much of your waking time attempting to increase your Google juice? Analyzing, dissecting, and trisecting the Google algorithms so as to have a higher search engine ranking has reached the point where it is a constant activity among corporations and organizations of all sizes, executives, entrepreneurs, and professional service practitioners. It pre-occupies anyone, anywhere who has a product or service to offer, a cause or an idea to champion, or simply wants to maintain any semblance of visibility in this increasingly Internet-dominated world.

I have met with entrepreneurs from across the state of North Carolina and throughout the country who, when I bring up this issue, bemoan this all-but-mandatory fixation. You're either in the game completely, or not at all. If you don't proactively take steps to maintain a healthy Google ranking, then by default you're likely to lose out. When people search for the vital terms that define your industry, product, or service, you will show up wherever you happen to, unlikely anywhere near the first page, and unlikely to be found by those people whom you could most aptly serve.

Was there a vote on all this? What day was it held? Did I miss the vote? This Orwellian nightmare has executives and entrepreneurs everywhere in its clutches. Unless we pay homage to the false Google god, we are doomed to obscurity.

### Relief on the Horizon?

Soon, as search engines become even more intelligent, anticipating what you're actually seeking instead of throwing thousands of hits up on the screen, a movement currently led by Wolfram/Alpha and Bing, you might presume that the situation will improve. Not necessarily. Regardless of how search engines determine what site ought to be at the top of a particular search, people will always seek to "game" the system.

A true meritocracy, where, say, an author or researcher has numerous legitimate articles and studies on a topic and has established himself or herself as a true authority, would undoubtedly give that person an exceedingly high ranking in a more intelligent search engine. Ideally... How long, however, before others found ways to rise to the top by catapulting their visibility through clever use of the research and findings generated by the exalted few scholars?

The basic problem with search engine rankings of any type is that one medium, the Internet, has become dominant. In the pre-Internet era, one could establish a reputation by word of mouth; by advertising through a variety of media such as television, radio, newspaper, magazines, and other space and place advertisements; by offering public forums such as seminars, workshops and training; by obtaining the right physical location, either in a high traffic density area or in close proximity to one's target market, and so on.

All of these vehicles are still available, but they're trumped by the overarching, omnipresent effect of search engine websites. Google is currently supreme, with Facebook, YouTube, and other sites quickly rising in popularity as their adherents use them for quasi-search engine look-ups.

### No Way Out

For the foreseeable future, no apparent way out of this dilemma appears. The false Google god is a beast, has no sympathy, does not respond to reason, and cares little about merit. It simply relies on mechanics to deem what's "popular," or "important," and, hence, what should, by default, rise to the top of the rankings. What a world!

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