



Have I been penalized..?

21 February 2011

## **Website owners want full transparency over search engine traffic penalties**

UK, London - A survey of more than 1000 UK and US website owners finds that almost a quarter (24%) had suffered large, unexplained falls in their site traffic.

Only around one in ten of respondents (11%) to the survey run by news navigator [www.onenewspage.com](http://www.onenewspage.com) were aware that unexplained falls in their site traffic could result from obscure penalties applied by the leading search engines.

Penalties are routinely imposed by search engines on websites which are considered illegitimate, such as spamming sites.

However, penalties can also be triggered accidentally, which can lead to dramatic losses of traffic to websites which are 'good citizens' of the Internet. The three leading search engines do not disclose any information about penalties or a website's penalty status.

The lack of transparency applies also to paid search. The One News Page survey found that well over half (57%) of those using paid search advertising claimed they had experienced unexplained increases to their bid costs. Most respondents (88%) said that paid search advertising costs lacked transparency.

Nearly 70% claimed the search engines could 'do whatever they liked' when it came to imposing penalties and this meant they had little or no control over their own

destiny.

In fact, almost two thirds of the site owners polled (64%) already felt too dependent on the leading search engines.

**Alan Perkins, MD of SilverDisc Ltd., experts in search engine optimisation best practices, said:**

“Search engine penalties have a big effect on site traffic. It’s a difficult area for the leading search engines but, given their enormous influence, it would be helpful if their penalty processes could become a lot less opaque to genuine websites, without, of course, becoming so transparent that malicious spammers could circumvent them.”

Google, with its dominant market position in many countries and commanding more than 70% of the global internet search market, has a particularly strong influence over almost every website’s success or failure.

It is therefore unsurprising the survey found that almost all respondents (94%) are asking for the leading search engines to be obliged to disclose any penalties to the relevant site owner.

The survey is part of a new campaign called “Have I been penalized..?”, which aims to educate site owners about secret search engine penalties and the potential risk they represent to web businesses.

**Dr Marc Pinter-Krainer, Chief Executive Officer of One News Page Ltd., said:**

“It is clear that a large number of site owners are concerned about unexplained falls in visitor traffic from search engines, yet only few are aware that search penalties are often the cause. Concerned site owners feel exposed to the leading search engines. They feel search engines have the ability to act as judge, jury and executioner over their sites, and they would like the penalty system to be much more open and transparent.”

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## **Notes**

### **About “Have I been penalized..?”**

The new “Have I been penalized..?” campaign at [www.haveibeenpenalized.com](http://www.haveibeenpenalized.com) asks leading search engines such as Google to introduce three transparency measures on penalties.

- First, to bring in a simple mechanism that tells the site owner that they have suffered a search penalty
- Second, to establish a communication mechanism which allows site owners to find out more about the nature of the penalty
- Third, to instigate a fast and efficient appeals process if site owners wish to challenge the penalty

The campaign is spearheaded by One News Page, a news aggregator which suffered an eight-month Google penalty, causing a 96% fall in Google organic visitor traffic to its site. The campaign is supported by ICOMP, the Initiative for a Competitive Online Market Place, an industry consortium promoting fairer competition on the Internet.

Site owners, to upload a case study, please click on <http://www.haveibeenpenalized.com/submit.php>

### **About One News Page**

One News Page is an international news navigator website featuring original news

coverage and syndicated news content from major trusted news sources around the world. The One News Page portal provides users with a powerful search engine to locate relevant news coverage easily. Users are referred to the source website directly by clicking on a news headline.

**One News Page Sites:**

- Global » <http://www.onenewspage.com> (English Language)
- United States » <http://www.onenewspage.us> (English Language)
- United Kingdom » <http://www.onenewspage.co.uk> (English Language)
- India » <http://www.onenewspage.in> (English Language)
- Australia » <http://www.onenewspage.com.au> (English Language)
- Deutschland » <http://www.newsdeutschland.com> (Deutsche Sprache)
- Global » <http://www.paginanoticias.com> (Idioma español)
- España » <http://www.paginanoticias.es> (Idioma español)
- México » <http://www.paginanoticias.mx> (Idioma español)

## **About ICOMP**

ICOMP, the Initiative for a Competitive Online Marketplace, is an industry initiative for businesses and organisations involved in the online marketplace. Its overall objective is the sustainable growth of the Internet and key goals are to encourage competition, transparency, data privacy and respect for intellectual property rights as well as the adoption of best practices to promote creativity, innovation and trust.

Over 50 companies, trade associations, consumer organisations and individuals have endorsed ICOMP's principles. These members represent 14 countries across Europe, North America and the Middle East.

ICOMP is funded by member contributions as well as sponsorship from Microsoft. Burson-Marsteller acts as its secretariat and Lord Alan Watson is ICOMP's first Chairman.