

GOOGLE'S AX FALLS ON GDS*

Competitors applaud but remain cautious

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**GDS goes by many names, such as Neighborhood Garage Door Service, Yes Garage Door Service, Fox Overhead Garage Doors, Five Star Garage Door Repair, Jimmy's Garage Doors, Global Development Strategies, and dozens more. "Garage Door Services of Houston" is a different company that has no connection with this GDS.*

Oct. 19, 2017, was a bad day for GDS, the notorious garage door repair company known for confusing customers with hundreds of business names, performing unnecessary repairs, and overcharging customers. On that date, this headline appeared in the Dallas Morning News: “Google kills hundreds of ads by ‘worst garage door company in the nation.’”

For more than a decade, Dave Lieber, the newspaper’s Watchdog columnist, has been reporting about the unsavory business tactics of GDS. Prior to Oct. 19, Lieber and his colleague, Marina Trahan Martinez, sent to Google a list of 500 domain names owned by GDS. The dizzying list of domains is part of GDS’s strategy to appear at the top of internet searches and lure unsuspecting customers in at least 30 major markets around the country.

Google acted quickly. They told Lieber: “Thanks for flagging these to us. As always, when we find ads on our platform that violate our policies we move swiftly to take action. We have removed these ads and the advertiser accounts.”

One act by Google

Sure enough, if you do a search for “garage door repair [city name]” in any of its markets, you will now rarely see one of GDS’s hundreds of websites in the top results.



Just like that. With this one act by Google, millions of Americans will have a hard time finding GDS in a “garage door repair” search on Google. This one act by Google may have more impact on GDS than all the customer complaints, negative media stories, lawsuits, and criminal convictions that have exposed their tactics since 2002.

GDS is “scrambling”

One GDS insider told us that the company is now “scrambling” to create new websites

and new business names to try to get around Google’s ban. “They took a huge hit in business,” he told us, preferring to remain anonymous.

Within only a few days, he said, GDS had launched an array of new websites that worked, but only briefly. In his case, GDS was using Yes[city name].com or .net. But within a couple of days, Google apparently caught them and killed the new site’s exposure on Google.

“Thanks for flagging these to us. As always, when we find ads on our platform that violate our policies we move swiftly to take action.”
—Google

How Google caught these new websites is unknown, but it appears to be like a whack-a-mole game, and Google is winning. For now.

“They’re trying to keep it hush-hush,” said our GDS informant, who indicated that GDS doesn’t want its technicians and employees to realize that the company is in trouble. This particular GDS technician said the loss of Google business is making him think more seriously about dumping GDS and starting his own business.

GDS spending on Google

We reported about GDS’s tactics in our fall 2015 cover story, “GDS: The worst garage

door company in the nation.” Its scheme has always been built on excessive advertising: with Yellow Pages back in the 1990s and now on Google and other search engines.

So, how much was GDS spending on Google? In 2015, Brett Stave, GDS’s director of marketing, posted on his LinkedIn page that GDS was spending “~\$850k per month” for search engine marketing and pay-per-click advertising. That’s \$10 million per year. Google spending was likely a massive chunk of that.

What Google “laws” were broken?

Google told Door + Access Systems that the removal of the GDS ads was the result of violations in its “untrustworthy behavior” policy. Such behavior includes “concealing or misstating information about the business” or “presenting a false identity, business name, or contact information.”

Google takes untrustworthy behavior very seriously. Google says: “Advertisers or

sites that are found to be untrustworthy are not permitted to advertise with us again.” So, it appears to be unlikely that GDS will get a second chance.

Fake names, false claims

We talked to a New Jersey-based national marketing firm that specializes in helping certain garage door companies and similar businesses with online advertising strategy. Its spokesperson, preferring to speak anonymously, identified several ways that, he believes, GDS is violating Google policies.

These likely violations include (1) the “double serving” tactic of using multiple domains to show multiple ads on the search page, (2) advertising with fake names, and (3) making false claims in ads and websites concerning its founding date and its location in a given city.

Stopping bid mania on AdWords

He said he welcomed the news of Google’s action against GDS because of the many ways that GDS hurts consumers as well as legitimate door companies. He added that other door companies get hurt when GDS bids aggressively for Google AdWords, which makes it much more expensive for honest garage door businesses.

“In some markets it has gotten so bad that the legitimate companies can’t advertise on AdWords and be profitable,” he explained. “GDS doesn’t mind getting leads for \$400 a lead because they could be bringing in \$1,500 each call.” Consequently, with GDS’s expulsion from Google, the bidding might become reasonable.

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He believes that Google has not caught all of GDS's accounts. In Long Island, for example, he says GDS is still "triple serving" with many domain names. He is also concerned about GDS continuing to have a presence on Google maps and in organic searches with "hundreds if not thousands of sites."

GDS competitors react

DH Pace, which owns garage door companies in more than 30 locations, often battles with GDS in many markets nationally. Steve Pascuzzi, president of DH Pace's Overhead Door Group and a recent member of the IDA board, said Google's move was "a great first step," but he is concerned whether Google will continue to hold GDS accountable.



We hope Google will continue to monitor GDS's advertising practices and act quickly to shut down further deceptive advertising attempts by GDS.

—Steve Pascuzzi

"In the past, to get around Google's rules, GDS typically would change its name or use a different marketing agency to manage their ad campaigns," he said. "We hope Google will continue to monitor GDS's advertising practices and act quickly to shut down further deceptive advertising attempts by GDS."

Yahoo and Bing?

According to StatCounter, Google commands 87 percent of search engine traffic in North America, while Bing gets 6 percent, and Yahoo gets 4 percent. Even though GDS is now largely absent from "garage door" searches on Google, GDS's sites continue to show up in similar searches on Yahoo and Bing. In addition, consumers will continue to call GDS (in all of its varied names) because of its extensive use of coupon books like ValPak.

Note: We contacted GDS three times, asking for their side of this story. We sent our request to an active email address for Jason Romo (GDS general manager) and to Ernest Leonard, a Dallas attorney for GDS. They did not respond. ■

To comment on this story, send an email to the editor at trw@tomwadsworth.com.

DON'T MESS WITH Google

Editor's note: The following language comes from Google's AdWords policies, which are posted online. The following prohibited practices have been frequently used by certain garage door repair companies.

Prohibited practices

- Ads that intend to deceive users by excluding relevant information or giving misleading information about products, services, or businesses. (Listed under "Misrepresentation")
- Making false statements about your identity or qualifications. (Listed under "Misleading content")
- Falsely implying affiliation with, or endorsement by, another individual, organization, product, or service. (Listed under "Misleading content")
- Providing a business name that is anything other than the domain (or) the recognized name of the advertiser. (Listed under "Misleading content")
- Concealing or misstating information about the business, product, or service. This includes presenting a false identity, business name, or contact information. (Listed under "Untrustworthy behavior")

What Google can do

We take untrustworthy promotions very seriously and consider them to be an egregious violation of our policies. Advertisers or sites that are found to be untrustworthy are not permitted to advertise with us again. Note that in determining whether an advertiser or site is untrustworthy, we may review information from multiple sources including your ad, website, accounts, and third party sources.

An account may be suspended if you have several violations or a serious violation. If this happens, all ads in the suspended account will stop running, and we may no longer accept advertising from you. Any related accounts may also be suspended, and your new accounts may be automatically suspended. (Listed under "Account suspension")

These prohibitions and policies can be found at <https://support.google.com/adwordspolicy>.

What you can do

If you see a competitor that is abusing Google's policies, you can inform Google of the violation. "We handle all complaints very seriously and have a dedicated team that is focused on enforcing our policies," says Google.

The place to post a complaint is <https://support.google.com/adwords/answer/176378>. Google says that all these posted complaints are read and considered. ■

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