Google’s Preferred Sources Tool Is Jammed With Spam via @sejournal, @martinibuster

Google’s Preferred Sources tool is meant to let fans of certain websites tell Google they want to see more of their favorite sites in the Top News feature. However, Google is surfacing copycat spam sites, random sites, and parked domains. Some of the sites appearing in the tool are so low quality that only their home pages are indexed. Shouldn’t this tool just show legitimate websites and not spam?

Google Preferred Sources

Google’s Preferred Sources feature gives users control over which news outlets appear more often in Google’s Top Stories feature. Rather than relying on Google’s ranking system alone, users can make their preferred news sources appear more frequently. This change doesn’t block other sites from appearing, it only personalizes what a user sees to reflect their chosen sources. Preferred Sources enablers users to have more control over which news sources appear more often.

Similar Domains In Preferred Sources

What appears to be happening is that people are registering domains that are similar to those of well-known websites. One way they’re doing it is by domain squatting on an exact match to domain name using a different TLD. For example, when a popular domain name is registered with a .com or .net the domain squatters will register the same domain name using a .com.in or .net.in domain name.

Screenshot Of A Random Subdomain Ranking For Automattic

Preferred Sources Errors

It’s unclear if people are registering domain names and adding them to the Preferred Sources tool or if they are being added in some different manner. A search for a popular SEO tool surfaces the correct domain but also a parked domain in the Indian .com.in ccTLD:

Screenshot Of An Indian Parked Domain

What is known is that people are registering copycat domains but how they’re getting into Google’s Preferred Sources tool is not well known. Preferred Sources is currently available in the USA and in India, which may explain the Indian domains showing up in the tool.

Screenshot Of Indian NYTimes Parked Domain

For example, a search within the Preferred Sources tool for Huffpost surfaces a copycat site on an Indian country code level domain.

Screenshot Of HuffPost In Source Preferences

That site Indian Huffpost site features articles (and links) to topics like payday loans, personal injury lawyers, and luxury watches. Not surprisingly, it doesn’t look like Google is indexing more than the home page of that site.

Screenshot Of A Site Search

There’s also an Indian site squatting on Search Engine Journal’s domain name.

Screenshot Of SEJ In Source Preferences Tool

What Is Going On?

It’s possible that SEOs are registering copycat domains and then submitting their domains to the Preferred Sources tool. Or it could be that Google picks them up automatically and is just listing whatever is out there.

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