Why Google Ranks Singular and Plural Keywords Differently via @martinibuster

Google's John Mueller was asked about why Google ranks different pages for singular and plural versions of keywords. John gave details on why Google's algorithm treated plural keywords differently from singular.

A publisher related that a client's site ranked different sections of a site for singular and plural.

This is the question:

> *"I have a question about singular and plural form of keyword.*
>
> *One of our clients the keyword is garden shed Sydney and garden sheds Sydney.*
>
> *Now, for garden sheds Sydney, the category page, the garden shed category page ranks in Google.*
>
> *But for the singular form garden shed Sydney, one of the blog posts is ranking on Google instead of the category page.*
>
> *Why is this different? Both keywords are the same, just singular and plural."*

Why Google Ranks Different Pages for Singular and Plural Keywords

Google's John Mueller prefaced his answer with a disclaimer that what he was about to say was in general and not specific

to the client site.

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Then Mueller started sharing details of why Google's algorithm ranks different sites for some queries that are singular and plural, even though they can be seen as synonyms.

> *"…we would see those queries as being different… And when we see them as being slightly different, then we might think that one or the other of these pages makes more sense to show.*
>
> *So usually with singular and plural, we do recognize that they're synonyms, more or less.*
>
> *But we also recognize that maybe there's something kind of unique to one of them or to the other one.*
>
> *Such as, if you're looking for a plural maybe you're looking more for like a list or a comparison page or maybe a category page of different kinds of these items.*
>
> *So that's something where our systems try to take that into account and it can result in slightly different results being shown for one or the other."*

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That's an important point he's making. I've noticed this in the search results. For some queries it appears that users expect to see lists of products or services.

When a user searches with a plural, for some searches it means that they expect to see a comparison of sites or a comparison of products.

This is why the client of the SEO who asked the question was ranking with a category page for the plural search phrase.

The category page satisfies the search intent for a listing of multiple products that is inherent in the plural version of the keyword phrase.

Google's Mueller then addressed the difficultly of trying to update pages in order to rank the desired page for a singular or plural version of a keyword phrase.

> *"It's a bit tricky when you're in that situation. You're like, oh but I want my other page to rank instead of this one. And you don't want to remove the page you currently have ranking.*
>
> *That's something where you… can't really force that, other than to tweak things subtly, that you kind of make sure that the right words, the right phrasing is on these pages, that you link them internally properly.*
>
> *But that's sometimes kind of tricky.*
>
> *It's also worth keeping in mind that just because when you take a step back that these words or these queries sound very similar and they seem very much the same, it might well be that user do treat them as different queries and do expect different kinds of results.*
>
> *So… before just jumping in and saying oh I need to have the same page rank for both of these, maybe check with some other people to see, does it make sense to change this?*
>
> *Or is this something where it's actually not that bad? …Another thing you can do is the page that's currently ranking, put some kind of a call to action on it and say hey, if you're looking for this, also check out this other page."*

In my opinion it's best to let the search engine results pages

tell you what the search intent is and then rank the most appropriate page for that search intent.

The SEO assumed he had a problem in that the category page ranked for the plural version of a search phrase and a blog article ranked for the singular.

But that’s not a problem. It’s a reflection of the search intent difference between the singular and plural.

Trying to “fix” a page that’s not broken could actually backfire by losing rankings for one of the keyword versions, since it’s been optimized for something it’s not really optimal for.

The relation of singular and plural versions of a keyword phrase to different kinds of web pages (general versus specific) is something many have known about but not really discussed all that much.

Google’s John Mueller clarified that plural versions of a keyword may indicate a search intent for multiple products or a comparison of different service providers.

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It’s good to see Mueller confirming what some in the search marketing industry had observed in the search results.

Watch Mueller answer the question here:

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