

Google Alters Search Rankings in Response to Pressure from Media Companies

By Andrew Martin

In a blog post on August 10th, [Google announced](#) that it will add a new ranking parameter, or “signal,” to its ever evolving search ranking algorithm: the number of valid copyright removal notices it receives for a given site. Google says that websites with high numbers of “valid copyright removal notices” may result in a lower ranking within search results. Google specifically refers to copyright owners such as NPR, Hulu, and Spotify, when it claims that the new results should benefit legitimate media companies by raising their potential ranking in search results.

Google goes on to point out that it is not in the business of investigating and ruling on copyright infringement, and will therefore not be removing any offending sites from its search results—it will only commit to degrading the ranking for those sites. This policy tracks with Google’s long-time position that it is not responsible for online infringement. Even so, the move to add the infringement notice “signal” to Google’s the search results algorithm represents a positive step towards guiding web searchers towards legitimate sources of the copyrighted materials they are looking for.

As expected, there is plenty of loose language in the announcement. What Google considers to be a valid copyright removal notice is not clear, nor is how important the new “signal” will be in the ranking algorithm, so it remains to be seen how well this new step will work to reduce piracy or access to pirated materials. Furthermore, the change highlights the fact that copyright owners are ultimately responsible for policing infringement. Copyright owners that do not diligently protect their intellectual property by failing to report alleged infringement are less likely to benefit from these changes.



About the author Andrew Martin:

As an associate attorney with extensive prior experience advising information technology start-ups, Andrew’s practice focuses on finding solutions for his clients’ intellectual property issues. Due to his extensive experience in the software and technology industries, Andrew understands both the practical and legal issues involved in IP licensing agreements and disputes. In addition to licensing, Andrew helps his clients find new ways to use existing technologies to assist his clients in areas such as data privacy compliance. Andrew uses his diverse background which includes founding a record label and working for a world-wide concert promoter when counseling the firm’s entertainment clients.

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