

## Google U-SERPs

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### Google Usurps the SERPs With a New Sponsored Ads Area

Google has usurped the SERPs. For a fleeting moment during the night of July 17th Google appears to have rolled out a change to the way in which it presents its ads on the Search Engine Results Pages. Though it didn't last the night it was a long and scary moment for SEOs.

On doing some searches for local Los Angeles businesses I found that they not only included their standard "Ads related to ...keyword" sponsored results but had dropped those down to accommodate a new group, entitled "SafeSearch ads related to...keyword". Safe Search Ads? They don't seem so safe for SEOs.

To my disbelief there were six (yes SIX) ads there at the top of the main central column. There was not a single organic listing to be seen above the fold. I first searched for an SEO related term... "Los Angeles SEO" (Image 1) and found it there. Wondering if it wasn't just Google targeting their favorite foes I swapped "SEO" for "Marketing" (Image 2) and there they were. Then I went for a more terrestrial search and swapped it out for "Los Angeles Plumber" (Image 3) and lo and behold I not only found the same two separate ad areas but also the Google local business results. There were, however, three organic results above the local results (as they often do) and 5 results below. So at this point there were six sponsored results, three organic, ten local and then 5 more organic results.

Who said you can't pay your way to the top of the SERPs? I remember the days Matt Cutts compared Google to a mama bear and their algorithm to its cub. And SEO's were poking a stick at the baby bear. We need to still poke the cub but it's also time we smacked the bear. Let's not let Google put us any lower or we'll see ourselves dropping deeper and deeper like a lead weight in a pool. I can imagine the statistics... 75% of users click on the paid ads because they're too lazy to click to the 6th page where the organic results begin.

I personally think that Panda, Penguin and the other updates that push quality up and spam down (though not so efficiently yet) are a great move in the right direction. This, however, is a step down the "Google don't be evil" path. The Search Engine dark side if you will.

Let's hope that it was just a late night prank on behalf of Google's engineers, or perhaps they just needed to make a quick hundred million over night. Let's positively think that this isn't a glimpse into the future of the SERPs. If they did it as a test to see the reaction of the SEO community then it's our duty to let them know that we don't agree with it.

One more thing to consider; do they really think we're all in some kind of mass trip? Those "pink" backgrounds that signify sponsored results have gotten so light that they're hardly noticeable unless you drop your mouse and glance at the screen as you bend down to pick it up.

This is quickly approaching "cheating" which previously has been reserved for Blackhat spammers. Google should play fair.

**Image 1: SERP for "Los Angeles SEO"**

**Image 2: "Los Angeles Marketing"**

**Image 3: "Los Angeles Plumber" (Sorry this one's so small!)**