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Is My Site In The AdSense Sandbox?

Does it even exist? It could be I have evidence.

A few months ago I saw a spike in traffic to a site of mine.

This site has real-time visitor stats available including the IP origin of all visitors on the site. It's easy to lookup the IP and see where the traffic originated. When I did this I discovered that the traffic was coming from Google Inc. At one point over a few days I had 20 visitors together on the site all from Google HQ.

This continued over a few weeks, although the number on site from Google simultaneously never matched the 20 again, I witnessed a steady hit rate throughout each day, some days reaching 10 or so Google HQ visitors at one time. But mostly they would pop up in 2's and 3's.

I still get these visitors... checking the site now and there is at least one Google employee on the site, there may be more. I recognize this one IP at least without checking.

It became obvious that my site was being watched and monitored by Google staff. I said hello via the sites broadcast system once or twice just for the fun of it. :)

Anyway, again a few months ago a trend began which involved placing images near your AdSense ads to catch the visitors' eye, in the hope that they would then read the ads nearby and click through. I believe I was one of the first to have these images up and running and this could be what got me spotted by Google.

The result of all this was two fold.

First of all, Google has been doing some serious 'messaging' with the display format of my ads. With a few AdSense blocks on a page I find more often than not many are disabled in favor of the leaderboard only across the top of the pages. But then much of the time the leaderboard will display just 1 or 2 AdSense ads rather than the usual 4.

This is fine; they're optimizing my ads for better CTR(Click Through Rate), great. But that's not all they're doing, they're tweaking the display of my ads in an annoying way. Every single AdSense ad has a thin black border around it. This is not configurable in the code at my end but something that Google have added at their end.

This wouldn't be so bad but for the AdSense ads that they don't display still having this thin black border. Essentially I finish up with pages that have big black squares or rectangles of empty space where the AdSense ads should be. Which is obviously not good for the look of the site especially if this is on an empty square ad in the middle of the page copy?

I've been watching this happen now for around 6 weeks.

The other, much better, upshot of all this is that following the Jagger update Google have really got their teeth into this site and started to throw lots of traffic at it from across their world network. I see visitors from Google searches in India, Norway, Germany, Auz, Arabia etc. Which is great? The monitoring has definitely had a positive effect.

My conclusion is that I popped up on the Google radar; they monitored me, and continue to, but decided that the site wasn't breaking any TOS and more importantly it wasn't a spam site.

I hope to see them drop those black borders soon, surely it can't be helping the CTR on the AdSense?

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