

Has your PC visited a Dot Con lately?

By John K. Flynn

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How to create MIDI-eBooks <http://midi-ebooks.com>

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In Russia nowadays, anybody who has recently become rich is labeled as possibly a criminal, enjoying what the locals call a "comfortable but short life". The competition must be fierce at the top.

This article is about my painful (and expensive) experience with a well known pay-per-click search engine.

Like many entrepreneurs, hungry for some traffic and sales, I decided to give my web site a boost by bidding for search terms that would get me listed at or near the top to sell my software.

I started off by paying \$200 into their coffers.

There's no denying, traffic flow was almost instantaneous.

I checked my statistics. They showed a high rate of click-throughs but my conversion rate was very low, so I set about improving my copy. It was not a big ticket item, costing \$15.

A few days later I received a message from the search engine staff saying that my funds were nearly depleted, and I should make a "top-up" of more funds, otherwise they would suspend my account.

So I went back and offered another \$50. This amount was rejected because, based on my present click-through rate it was not sufficient to cover one month of charges.

Soon after, I received another message telling me that my account was suspended.

I went to alter my bids on the search terms, but I was locked out because my account was in suspension. I was able to read the reports showing heavy click-throughs on a small group of search terms related to my product.

My earnings from sales was barely covering the cost of Advertising. A funny co-incidence that ..?

I decide to stop promoting this item and concentrate on products where the search term bids were cheaper and the profits higher.

I went back to the search engine and contributed another \$200. I went immediately to my search term management page and reduced my bid to zero on all search terms relating to that previously mentioned product which was not showing a profit.

I felt confident that my \$200 would last a month or even more. Not so. Four days later I received another email, saying that my account was suspended. Click-throughs had used up my \$200 reserve!

I checked my stats again and to my astonishment found that the click-throughs were on the search terms that I thought I had eliminated. Don't ask me how this happened. I have since cancelled my account.

I had already complained about the possibility of malicious click-throughs. These are made by devious competitors or amateur hackers clicking away continually on your link to ensure your early removal from the top of the list so they move themselves up into your place or gain some inexplicable pleasure.

The search engine support told me they have a system that eliminates false or malicious click-throughs, but they said their methods were "kept secret" and if I was still not satisfied, they would investigate the matter further for me.

A question arose in my mind, "why should they want to reduce click-throughs anyway?" That is the key to their income!

On a slightly different angle now.

Have you heard about servers being subjected to "denial of service" attacks? The hackers make use of on-line computers around the world to direct hits to any given server and the massive amounts of traffic cause the targeted server to crash.

The owners of the surrogate PCs used in the attack have no idea that their PCs are being used for these stupid games played by the hackers. Has your PC been used this way?

Now, would it be unreasonable to postulate that an unscrupulous search engine owner could use the same technique to direct a pre-determined number of random hits to his own server? He could then re-direct these "visitors" to search terms where most money could be earned. By analysing the statistics, he would also know just how much to dilute your genuine click-throughs to ensure that you could break even or perhaps make a small profit.

Investigation would be difficult to expose this scam. Our server logs would simply show a large number of hits from PC's around the world - which would look much like legitimate traffic.

The key would be to check how long those visiting PC's stayed at your web site. Genuine visitors would hang around for at least 30 seconds or more and since they were interested in your product, may even stay a few minutes.

"False" visitors on the other hand, having achieved their goal would most likely log off within a second or even less.

So I ask you, are you paying for legitimate click-throughs?

And do you know of any pay-per-click search engine owners (not necessarily Russian), that have recently become rich?

Dr John Flynn publishes a monthly HTML ezine called:

"The Xerostar Times" and his motto is "caring for creative people"

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