

# NEW HELP FOR FIGHTING BAD BOB ON GOOGLE

Specialists have the inside track on reporting Google violations

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In recent months, we've been able to find a new source of help for honest garage door dealers who are losing business because of Bad Bob's Google tactics.

They are Google Top Contributors. These are non-Google employees who have demonstrated expertise in helping people who use Google products. In particular, a Google My Business (GMB) Top Contributor is someone who has built a good reputation in the Google forums that deal with the Google My Business tool.

No, they're not a dime a dozen. There are only about 12 Google My Business specialists *in the world*. Better still, we found two of them who have had experience in battling garage door repair companies that abuse Google policies.



**First, meet Tom Waddington** (tomgsa@gmail.com). He is the guy who uncovered the list of 500 domains used by GDS.\* When Tom gave his list to the Dallas Morning News, they gave it to Google, and within 24 hours, Google shut down hundreds of ads by GDS.(!)

## Tom, how did you stumble upon the list of 500 domains used by GDS?

I compiled the list myself, and that's only part of it. I had been assisting a garage door company owner who was having an issue with his Google My Business listing. While troubleshooting his issue, I noticed numerous Google My Business listings that were questionable.

Many were obviously fake, meaning the business didn't exist the way the listing made it appear. Most were posing as garage door companies, but they weren't using the names of real businesses. And most didn't exist at the physical address shown on their listings. They were just created to help generate leads in a deceptive manner, and all were in violation of Google My Business guidelines.

Looking at various patterns, I was able to identify that GDS was responsible for a few of the listings in the door company owner's area as well as many others across the country. I had no prior knowledge of GDS, but I found several articles detailing their abuse of consumers and honest garage door companies, so I felt compelled to look into it more.



## So, GDS actually has more than 1,000 domains?

Yes, well over that, and the number is likely growing.

## How do these domains violate Google's policies?

The domains themselves don't violate policy, but their websites and AdWords ads are misleading. From what I have learned about them, "untrustworthy behavior" would also be a good description of how they operate. These are examples of misrepresentation violations per Google AdWords policies.

## Google said they killed all those GDS ads, but GDS continues to generate new sites that sneak in under Google's radar. How does GDS get away with this?

Google can ban domains and kill advertiser accounts, but that doesn't prevent GDS from getting new ones. Google recently began implementing Advanced Verification for AdWords. This will be a big step in keeping GDS out of AdWords because it specifically looks to weed out businesses that utilize misleading and deceptive tactics or engage in fraudulent behavior.

Anyone who wants to advertise garage door services with Google AdWords (in the U.S.) must pass this Advanced Verification step or their ads won't run. Google's Local Services (Google Guaranteed) ads will also help reduce the visibility of GDS in Google's search results. This newer type of ad platform is currently present in about 30 U.S. metros.

Local Services ads appear at the top of the results, and participating advertisers face even more scrutiny to get into

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*\*GDS goes by hundreds of names. As of early 2018, their primary name is Neighborhood Garage Door Service. They are also known by variations of Yes Garage Door Service, Five Star Garage Door Repair, Jimmy's Garage Doors, Patriot Garage Doors, Fox Overhead Garage Doors, Garage Door Services, Global Development Strategies, and hundreds more. "Garage Door Services of Houston" is a different company that has no connection with this GDS.*

the program. In addition to passing Advanced Verification, their employees who go to customers' homes must pass a background check.

### **We've noticed that GDS is now using [www.unbouncepages.com](http://www.unbouncepages.com) sites. What are those?**

Unbounce is a service that people can use to create landing pages for websites. Some businesses and agencies use it to create landing pages for their AdWords campaigns. But after they create the pages, they connect them to the domain of the business. That way, the domain name that appears on their Google AdWords ad would be their own domain instead of [unbouncepages.com](http://www.unbouncepages.com).

GDS is not doing that step. It's clear to me that the entire reason they're using Unbounce is to avoid the domain name ban.

### **Google says the place for dealers to post a complaint is <https://support.google.com/adwords/answer/176378>. Do you think this will be effective?**

It will depend on the complaint. I would recommend that in addition to posting there, they should also post the complaint in the AdWords community forum. A Top Contributor may be able to provide additional assistance or point them in the right direction.

### **Do you offer services that could help an honest dealer?**

Yes. I only work with a small group of clients, but I will take a look at Google My Business, AdWords, or Local Services ad-related issues that an honest dealer is experiencing. My ability to help with their situation and the cost associated with it would be determined on a case-by-case basis.

### **If an honest garage door dealer is having a problem with a competitor who is using deceptive tactics, what should the honest dealer do?**

If you see abuse with map listings, you can report it at the GMB (Google My Business) forum: <http://g.co/gmbcommunity>. For abuse relating to a competitor's ads on Google, post on the AdWords forum: <http://g.co/adwordscommunity>.

"Advanced Verification ... specifically looks to weed out businesses that utilize misleading and deceptive tactics or engage in fraudulent behavior."

– Tom Waddington



### **Now, meet Joy Hawkins**

([joy@sterlingsky.ca](mailto:joy@sterlingsky.ca)). Joy has been a GMB Top Contributor since 2012, and she has posted online comments about Google abuse by garage door companies. Her communication with Google has resulted in immediate removal of deceptive listings for a garage door company.

### **Joy, give us a brief sketch of the types of companies and violations that you have reported to Google with a positive outcome (e.g., getting them removed from Google listings).**

There are usually three types of spam that I look for and can get removed.

**1. Fake reviews.** I would say that about 70 percent of the fake reviews reported on the Google My Business forum are removed. It usually comes down to how obvious they are and how well we can prove that the reviews were not from legit customers.

Many people think that Google will just remove reviews because of the sheer volume of them. Unfortunately, that's not generally enough to convince Google to remove them. The highest rate of success is normally when we can tie the reviews to a huge network such as a marketing company that posts reviews for hundreds or thousands of businesses.

**2. Ineligible Google My Business listings.** These would be either duplicate listings for the same company or listings that are created for addresses where the business is not physically present. Service businesses are allowed one listing but often create several using employees' home addresses. These are normally easy to spot, and the success rate of getting them removed is very high.

Additionally, lots of businesses use mailing services or virtual office services to get listed. But Google is quite diligent at removing these when we report them.

**3. Keyword stuffing.** Lots of businesses add keywords to their business name to rank higher on Google. This is against Google guidelines, and when they are reported, we can get the listings fixed. Google will also often remove the listing entirely if the business owner doesn't stop adding the keywords back.

I recently wrote an article that explains how to properly report spam on the Google My Business forum. The only negative to reporting spam on the forum is that we don't have enough volunteers to get to every thread, so there are lots of threads that go unanswered.

As far as what types of companies get reported, it's a wide range. But we see the highest volume on lawyers, drug rehabs, and home-based businesses including locksmiths, garage door companies, plumbers, etc.

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**If a garage door company hired you to help them fight another company that was abusing Google, what would be the primary pieces of evidence you would need in order to proceed with reporting them to Google?**

(1) Photos of the location if it's not easily seen on Google Street View, (2) the business license for that company, if available, and (3) the location where their phone number rings. Honestly, for service businesses, we often don't need much information because it's clear that multiple listings aren't allowed.

**In addition to helping an honest door company fight against Google violations by shady competitors, what other useful services could you provide?**

We offer a couple different options at my agency. First, we have a consulting service for people who want us to just help them with a specific issue (such as fighting spam).

Second, we have a full SEO/SEM (Search Engine Optimization/Search Engine Marketing) program that we run for a very small group of clients. We're really selective and picky about who we work with. It's extremely important to me that I'm working with reputable and ethical businesses.

I also track progress/success based on the number of calls the business gets. So it's really important for me to make sure that your business gets a good ROI. I get calls from many businesses that are not a good fit for my agency, but I'm more than happy to refer them elsewhere.

**Explain what your typical service would look like in terms of length of time and services rendered.**

When it comes to Local SEO, Google often changes more than a dozen things in just one month. So I can honestly say I have never

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– Joy Hawkins

run out of things to do to help the businesses that hire us. I recently posted a list of 92 Google changes that I tracked last year.

When we're dealing with fighting spam, we can do it as one-time project. But spammers don't generally just back down and give up. When you remove a listing, the person who created it will usually attempt to do it again. For businesses in competitive markets, we normally suggest 2 to 5 hours a month.

**Can you add any other information that might be useful to our readers?**

I'm one of many volunteers who help on the Google My Business forum. It's a great place to get free help, but you need to be aware that the volunteers are not compensated for their time. So, you need to be patient when posting questions or problems there. ■

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