

website in the organic listing. The implication is that the organic listings are “impartial”, “fair”, “accurate”.

The “ads”, on the other hand, are part of the “Google AdWords” scheme. 97% of Google’s income comes from advertising ([source](#)). They are expecting advertising income in the UK in 2011 to be about £2.5 billion. In fact, this year they are expected to out-run ITV as the biggest earner from advertising in the UK ([source](#)).

The way that these ads work on Google results pages is that the advertiser “bids” up to a defined amount to have his ad displayed when searchers enter certain words or phrases into the search box. But it’s not the actual displaying of the ad that costs the advertiser money. It costs him nothing unless the searcher actually clicks on his ad (which then takes them to the advertiser’s website).

So why should I care about the difference?

A lot of people maintain that they are never swayed by ads, never read them, would never click on them on a Google results page etc. These same people are happy, however, to use Google search to provide them with apparently “fair and impartial” organic results.

Well, I think that those people need to re-consider what’s actually going on here because the “organic” search results are most definitely NOT unbiased, value-free, simple reflections of the websites that are the most pertinent to their search term.

Google do not divulge how they work out which websites to display and in which order (known as ranking). They do, however, issue guides as to the kind of things that are most likely to impress them so that they show a particular website in their results and, just as importantly, how high up the list. They develop ever more complicated “algorithms” that are meant to fine-tune the validity of the results they display. “Validity”, however, is defined - in this context - by Google themselves and evaluated by their (secret) algorithms.

Since a good, high, listing in Google search results is a valuable asset to anyone wanting more website traffic, it stands to reason that it’s worth spending time (and money) honing a website so that it will be looked on favourably by the Google-gods. This means jumping through all of Google’s hoops (both known and guessed-at) to get the website up the rankings.

A whole industry (called “Search Engine Optimisation” or SEO) has developed to cater for this. If you own a website you are quite possibly being bombarded with unsolicited email and phone calls from so-called SEO experts promising to get your website ranked near the top of page one of Google results. As a provider of computer support, I would suggest that Google advertising in general, and SEO optimisation in particular, may well be marketing tools that you should investigate, but be very careful in selecting a company to act on your behalf.

So, my point here is not that we shouldn't use Google search. After all, they have over 90% of the UK search market. My point is that all those purists who claim never to click on ads because they "never take any notice of advertising" (which is, of course, utterly impossible in our society) are being illogical by clicking on Google's organic results as these organic listings are no more free or unbiased than the entries which are more openly listed under the heading of "ads". Their appearance and prominence has just been paid for in a different way.

Share this:

- [Click to share on Twitter \(Opens in new window\)](#)
- [Click to share on Facebook \(Opens in new window\)](#)