

Anger at 'unethical' web links

Property spruiking firm Richmastery is at the centre of a Googling row with several top financial authors and property investors, including some who accuse it of plagiarism.

Richmastery is paying Google for sponsored links to appear when people search the web for names like Martin Hawes, Ollie Newland, Andrew King, Lisa Dudson, Kieran Trass, Dorien Forster, the Auckland Property Investors' Association, and the companies Global Business Ideas, Acumen and Empower Education.

But the owners of those names say they resent Google profiting by linking them to Richmastery against their will.

Martin Hawes, the country's best-selling financial author, said: "I have never done any business with Richmastery and nor do I ever want to, so no, I'm not happy about it. They should have paid me the courtesy of a phone call to ask me if I minded before they did this."

Peter Aranyi, whose publishing firm Empower Publishing is pursuing Richmastery for plagiarism of its authors including Ollie Newland and Mark Withers, said: "It's outrageous that people can Google my name and at the top of the list of results there's Richmastery. It might be legal, but is it ethical?"

Property investor Kieran Trass, of the Hybrid Group said: "It's underhanded. I have nothing to do with that company, and I don't want to. They are leveraging off other people's efforts to gain a financial reward with no recompense to the people they are linking to."

Lisa Dudson, an independent financial planner from Acumen, the financial brain behind TV Three's Money Man, said: "I don't think it's ethical. I don't feel they share any similar philosophy or values with me. I'm not a happy camper."

Andrew King, president of the Auckland Property Investors' Association, said: "I'm not happy about it at all. It does seem they are using my name to further their own ends."

Richmastery founder Phil Jones says the firm is doing nothing wrong. He invited anyone disgruntled at his firm to raise the subject with him personally.

Google searches of businesses in other sectors show the practice is common.

Google spokesman Rob Shilkin said anyone can make a bid, through its online Adwords auction system, for a sponsored link to appear when specific keywords are Googled, with the highest paying bidders having their links appearing either at the top of the search results or to the right under a ghosted title of "Sponsored Links".

The system is not monitored, but there are guidelines which include not infringing anyone's trademarks or copyrighted material.

Shilkin said it would investigate if a complaint is made, but had received no complaint against Richmastery.

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