

Google makes up for years of allowing scammers top spots in search results with new system

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The way to shop for home services in Dallas-Fort Worth and beyond has changed for the better. Google has stepped up with a new service that's supposed to separate professional, reliable companies from scammers.

This is long overdue.

Roofers and garage door repair companies—among the most troublesome industries—must prove themselves to Google or they disappear from top [search](#) results, especially advertising.

Google's ranking of approved service companies went online in our market about a month ago.

The Watchdog is pleased to share with you some news: A dozen other occupations also are now subject to Google's intense scrutiny. I'll share the rest of the trades involved. You may be as amazed at this development as I am.

Businesses that pass Google's scrutiny now show up in searches with little white checks in green circles. That's the Google Guaranteed seal of approval, called the "Badge of Trust."

This is a significant development. Google has vetted these companies—checking licenses, insurance, and in some cases, employees' criminal records. Because of this, Google backs up its guarantee with a slogan: "Get the job done right or Google pays you back."

CALLED 'LOCAL SERVICES BY GOOGLE'

Google seeks to filter out liars, thieves, jerks, incompetents and numbskulls who take money for a job and don't finish, or who do substandard work.

The tech titan especially wants to make sure it isn't

helping these losers attract customers through its world-dominating search platform—as was the case in the past. Google says it wants to help local companies that keep their promises to customers.

Texas consumers need the help, especially in rip-off industries like air conditioning repair, roofing and garage door maintenance.

For years, Google search results were manipulated by techies who knew how to work the system to get their businesses placement on the first page of search results—whether they were honest or not.

When you hire a contractor, unless it's your brother-in-law (and even then ...), you're rolling the dice. Is he local? Does he know what he's doing? Will he finish the job?

Google aims to fix that.

BUSINESSES CHECKED BY GOOGLE

Here's a list of trades that now carry the guarantee check when you search:

- Electrician—Carpet cleaning—Garage door repair—House cleaning—HVAC—Lawn care—Locksmith—Moving [company](#)—Pest control—Plumber—Roofing—Tree service—Water damage restoration—Window cleaning—Window repair

CONSUMERS TO BENEFIT

Tom Waddington, a Google advertising expert who helps companies get good search placement, told me: "Fortunately, consumers will benefit with increased odds of finding a trustworthy contractor, but there are still opportunities for unscrupulous contractors to appear on the first page of results on

Google.

"The regular organic search results, and particularly the map results, are still areas that are being abused to a large extent. And Google ads can still appear in the search results when local services ads are present.

"Locksmiths and garage door companies can't abuse Google ads like they did in the past now that Google is requiring them to also pass Advanced Verification."

GOOGLE'S ADVANCED VERIFICATION

How does Advanced Verification work?

Google arranges a video call with the company using its Google Hangouts platform.

"Please be at your business location during the call," Google tells businesses. "If you operate your business out of your vehicle, have the vehicle nearby during the call. Be sure to have with you any official documentation related to your business."

HOW DO SHOPPERS USE THE SERVICE?

Let's say you want a garage door repaired. Until recently, if you typed "dallas garage door repair" in a search box, you'd find companies that spent the most on advertising. They'd pop atop search results.

Now, those companies, some of whom engaged in unethical—even criminal—behavior, no longer appear. Only companies that pass verification appear on top with the coveted check of approval.

Since most people never go beyond the first page of [search results](#), the goal is to find honest companies up top.

Often, the results will show companies that operate businesses near you. Fly-by-nighters and crooks are now supposed to have a difficult time getting traction on Google.

The first page of Google results is the most

precious real estate in advertising. The Watchdog hopes this helps consumers find honest repair people. We'll watch closely how this works.

IN THE KNOW

These professions in North Texas are now subjected to Google's tight standards for online advertising: electrician; carpet cleaning; garage door repair; house cleaning; HVAC; lawn care; locksmith; moving company; pest control; plumber; roofing; tree service; water damage restoration; window cleaning and window repair.

Google wants to block businesses that engage in untrustworthy behavior that conceals mistakes or misstates information about a business, product or service.

Google doesn't want ads to include superlatives such as "best," "No. 1," "better than" and "faster than."

If a business owner or a user believes a business listing is fraudulent, report it by clicking "Suggest an edit" on a [business](#) listing, then clicking the "report" button.

In its ad policy, Google warns. "We don't want users to feel misled by ads that we deliver, so we strive to be clear and honest."

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