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Turning SERP Obstacles Into Opportunities: *Shifting the Strategic Direction of Title Tags*

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BRIGHTEDGE

Agenda

Google updates rock the boat...AGAIN

Re-visiting best practices

Experimenting with hypotheses

Evaluating results

Key take-aways



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Just Another Typical Day.....

Morning Coffee

Multi-tasking While Lunch

Team Meeting

Conference Calls

Friendly Report Reminder From The Boss



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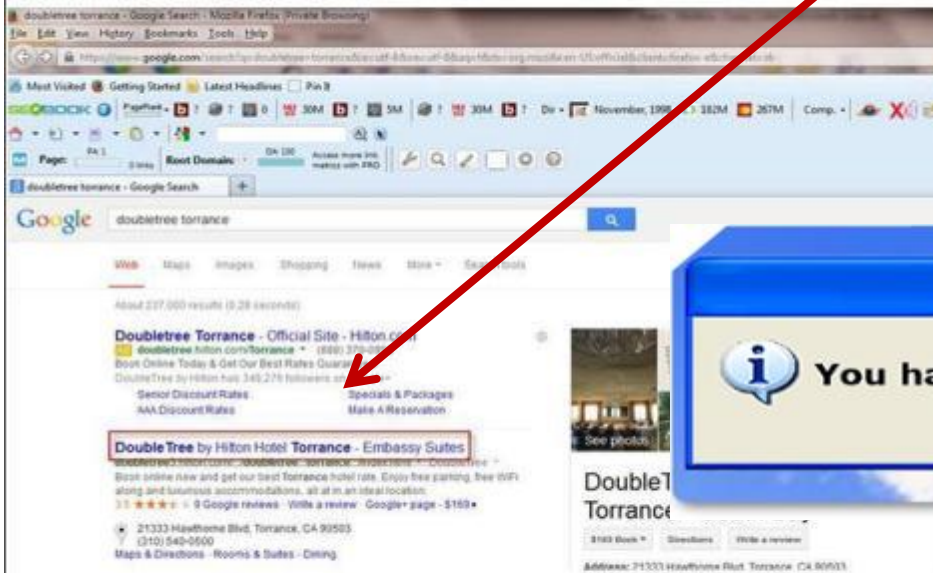
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To: Nathan [redacted]
Subject: Embassy Suites showing up in title tag in SERPs for Doubletree

Hey Nathan,

Have you guys ever seen this? Google is adding "embassy suites" in the title tag in the serps listing for this Doubletree hotel



From: Nathan [redacted]
Sent: Friday, April 25, 2014 11:16 AM
To: Casey [redacted]
Cc: Melissa Walser
Subject: RE: Embassy Suites showing up in title tag in SERPs for Doubletree

Can you go ahead and submit a request to remove the "by Hilton Hotel" from the title?

We're seeing this in other DoubleTrees and hope that yours can be our guinea pig to resolve.



To: Casey [redacted]
Subject: RE: Embassy Suites showing up in title tag in SERPs for Doubletree

Should be live tomorrow.

14 2:16 PM

To: Casey [redacted]
Subject: RE: Embassy Suites showing up in title tag in SERPs for Doubletree



Actual HTML Title Tag
Torrance Hotels - DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel Torrance – South Bay, CA

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From: Casey
Date: Monday, April 28, 2014 at 9:30 AM
To: Nathan
Subject: RE: Embassy Suites showing up in title tag in SERPs for Doubletree

Looks like that fix worked. See below:

The screenshot shows a Google search for "doubletree torrance". A red arrow points from the text "Looks like that fix worked" to the search results. The search results include a link to the official site, "DoubleTree Torrance - Official Site - Hilton.com", with a snippet: "Book Online Today & Get Our Best Rates Guaranteed! DoubleTree by Hilton has 354,297 followers on Google+ You've visited hilton.com 3 times. Last visit: 3 days ago". Below this are two buttons: "Senior Discount Rates Make A Reservation" and "Bed & Breakfast Package Specials & Packages". A red box highlights the search result for "Torrance Hotels - DoubleTree Torrance - South Bay, CA" with a snippet: "Book online now and get our best Torrance hotel rate. Enjoy free parking, free WiFi along and luxurious accommodations, all in an ideal location. 3.7 ★★★★★ 9 Google reviews · Write a review · Google+ page - \$169". Below this is a location pin and address: "21333 Hawthorne Blvd, Torrance, CA 90503 (310) 540-0500". To the right is a hotel listing card for "DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel Torrance - South Bay" with a map, photos, and details: "Address: 21333 Hawthorne Blvd, Torrance, CA 90503 Phone: (310) 540-0500 Hotel class: 3 stars".

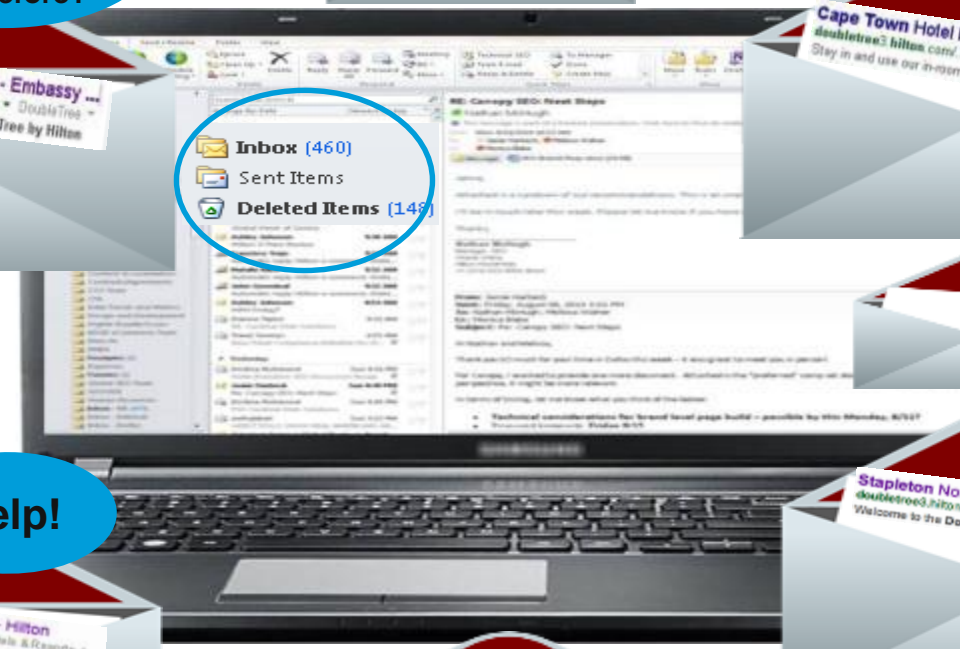
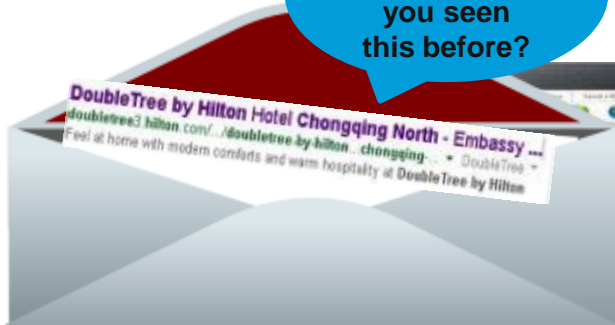
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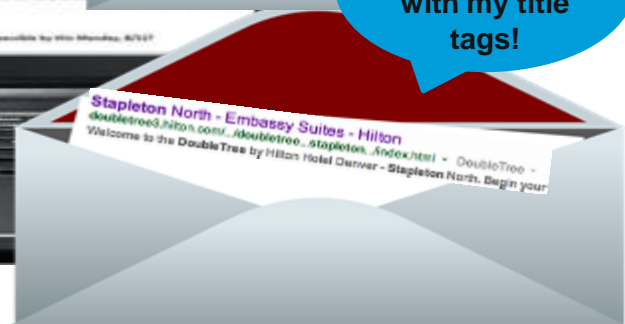
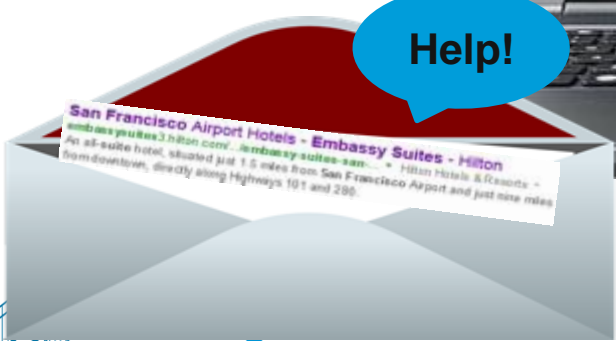
Dear SEO Team, Have you seen this before?

What should I do?



Something is wrong with my title tags!

Help!



While Google regularly updates their algorithm around 500-600 times a year, a lot of significant updates were taking place simultaneously during this time.

- **March 10th – New SERP layout is launched**
 - Title tag font increased from 16 pixels to 18 pixels, cutting down appearance in search results by 15%.
- **March 24th – “Soft” Panda update (rumored)**
 - Large fluctuations observed via Google Webmaster tools – often indicative of an algorithm update.

April 28th – Friendly reminder from Matt Cutts

- **May 16th – Payday Loan 2.0 (confirmed)**
 - Algorithm update that targets spammy queries. Not specific to our business, but still notable algorithmic activity.
- **May 19th – Panda 4.0 (confirmed)**
 - Changes to how the Panda algorithm identifies sites with spammy content.

The screenshot shows a video player with the following content:

Google's Matt Cutts: Why Google Will Ignore Your Page Title Tag & Write Its Own
Apr 20, 2014 at 2:41pm ET by Barry Scheratz

Google's Matt Cutts posted a [video](#) answer on the question about why and when Google will ignore your title tag and use something else for the snippet title in the search results.

Matt explains in the video that Google really wants the title of the snippets to match on some level the query of the searcher. This logic often results in a higher click-through rate on the URL and thus should be better for both the searcher and the web site owner.

The criteria Google uses when coming up with a new title tag are:

- (1) Something that is "relatively" short
- (2) Have a good description of the page and "ideally" the site that the page is on.
- (3) And that it is relevant to the query.

If your existing title fits the criteria, then Google will most likely use your title tag. If not, then Google may use (1) content on your page, (2) anchor text links pointing to the page and/or (3) may also use the Open Directory Project.

Here is the video:

How does Google choose titles for search results?

The video player shows a man in a red shirt speaking, with a play button overlay.

Re-Visiting Best Practices

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Possible Root Cause

In addition to the algorithmic activity and SERP layout changes, we identified four consistent issues that were likely contributing to our title tag revisions:

- Title tags too long - over 60 characters
- LOTS of repetition
 - City name and the word “hotel” repeated in the name of the hotel and primary keyword target(s)
- Missing page content identifier
 - Ex: Title tag for guest room description page did not contain anything about guest rooms
- Hotel name located at the end of the title tag and getting cut off from the users view in search results

Time To Re-Think Title Tags?

While there is very little in the world of SEO that hasn't gone through changes over the years, title tags have very rarely required any sort of dramatic shift in strategy. However, these latest updates had us re-evaluating best practice recommendations.

Where Google Is Headed

- **Do more with less**
 - Bigger pixels = less space (16px vs 18px)
 - Max of 55 -60 characters
- **Focusing on mobile**
 - Mobile devices automatically display less character space.
- **New SERP layout is better for ads**
 - Reducing character space in organic titles makes them closer in appearance to paid ad titles
- **Maintain SERP quality for users**
 - Focus on content, not keywords



Experimenting With Hypotheses

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Testing Google.co.uk Results

Determine if Google prefers generic terms listed before branded terms or vice versa.

Doubletree Chester hotel – Spa hotel
Chester – Hilton



DoubleTree Chester hotel – Spa Hotel Chester – Hilton
[doubletree3.hilton.com/en/hotels/.../doubletree-by...chester.../index.html](#) ▾
Set on a dozen picturesque acres, the **DoubleTree** by Hilton Hotel & Spa **Chester** is an 18th century manor house with full-service spa, 10 treatment rooms.



Doubletree Tower of London hotel -
Tower of London



DoubleTree Tower of London hotel - Tower of London
[doubletree3.hilton.com/.../doubletree...london-tower-of-london.../index....](#) ▾
Discover the City at the **DoubleTree** Tower Hill hotel, near **Tower of London** and financial hubs. Rooms with iMac and free WiFi. Panoramic SkyLounge bar.



Doubletree Sheffield hotel - Sheffield -
DoubleTree



DoubleTree Sheffield Hotel - Sheffield - DoubleTree
[doubletree3.hilton.com/en/hotels/.../doubletree...sheffield.../index.html](#) ▾
Surrounded by landscaped gardens in a quiet suburb, this modern **Sheffield** hotel offers elegant event spaces, an award-winning restaurant and WiFi.



London West End hotel - Doubletree
by Hilton West End Hotel



DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel London - West End - Embassy ...
[doubletree3.hilton.com/en/hotels/.../doubletree...west-end.../index.html](#) ▾
A stylish **West End** hotel with historic charm, **DoubleTree** is walking distance from the British Museum and Oxford Street. Restaurants, bar and event space.



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Over a period of 60 days, we tested two different approaches for formatting title tags. Performance would be measured by click-through-rate and rankings utilizing data from BrightEdge and Google Webmaster Tools.

Test Group 1

Structure and format similar to a short sentence

Market	Keyword Target	Title Tag Example
Houston	Hotels in Spring TX	Hampton Inn Houston Cypress Station Hotel in Spring, TX
Phoenix	Hotels in Phoenix Area	Hampton Inn Hotel in the Midtown Phoenix Area
Fresno	Hotels Fresno	Hampton Inn and Suites Hotel in Northwest Fresno
Tucson	Hotels Tucson AZ	Embassy Suites Paloma Village Hotel in Tucson, AZ

Test Group 2

Standard structure and format

Market	Keyword Target	Title Tag Example
Houston	The Woodlands Hotels	Hampton Inn Houston - The Woodlands Hotel
Phoenix	Phoenix Airport Hotel	Hampton Inn Phoenix Airport North Hotel
Fresno	Fresno Hotels	Hampton Inn and Suites Fresno, California Hotel
Tucson	Tucson Hotels	Embassy Suites Tucson Williams Center Hotel

- Tested on home page
- Primary keyword untouched
- Shorten the length to 55 characters or less
- Eliminate repetition of words
- Hotel name first, keyword second

Evaluating Results

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Individual Hotel Results

Group 1

Market	Keyword Target	Title Tag Example	CTR	Total # of Rankings	Page 1 # of Rankings
Houston	Hotels in Spring TX	Hampton Inn Houston Cypress Station Hotel in Spring, TX	+2pt	+13%	+111%
Phoenix	Hotels in Phoenix Area	Hampton Inn Hotel in the Midtown Phoenix Area	+2pt	-7%	+31%
Fresno	Hotels Fresno	Hampton Inn and Suites Hotel in Northwest Fresno	-1pt	+18%	+67%
Tucson	Hotels Tucson AZ	Embassy Suites Paloma Village Hotel in Tucson, AZ	+2pt	-6%	+395%

Group 2

Market	Keyword Target	Title Tag Example	CTR	Total # of Rankings	Page 1 # of Rankings
Houston	The Woodlands Hotels	Hampton Inn Houston - The Woodlands Hotel	+2pt	+61%	+413%
Phoenix	Phoenix Airport Hotel	Hampton Inn Phoenix Airport North Hotel	+7pt	+19%	+417%
Fresno	Fresno Hotels	Hampton Inn and Suites Fresno, California Hotel	+1pt	+25%	+150%
Tucson	Tucson Hotels	Embassy Suites Tucson Williams Center Hotel	+3pt	+15%	+183%

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Group Total Results

Group 1

Impressions	Clicks	CTR	Total # of Rankings	Page 1 # of Rankings
-20%	-4%	+2pt	-1%	175%

Group 2

Impressions	Clicks	CTR	Total # of Rankings	Page 1 # of Rankings
-18%	+17%	+2pt	+26%	251%

Tips To Take-away

- For big sites, run title tag tests on top traffic pages
- Mix it up - try different formats on different pages
- Use a variation of the page type name
- Place your brand name at the beginning
- Shorter is better. Keep the length to less than 60 characters.
- If you need to go over 60 characters, make sure your sequencing has the most important phrases within the first 60.
- Keep it natural - avoid repetition of words or phrases.

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Thank You!

Melissa Walner



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