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Fixing typos; website takes your search term and converts it into dozens of typo-plagued variations

Posted 28 days ago

Sometimes a typo is more than a typo. Like a few years ago when a local Chinese restaurant mailed out menus with a chicken dish featuring "tender white meat of children." (True story.)

Or when a Miami lawyer filed court documents on behalf of a client who had just undergone painful disk surgery and couldn't sit through a trial. Except in his motion, the lawyer typed disk with a "c" instead of an "s." (Also a true story.)

When it comes to auction sites and online classified ads, typos can end up costing sellers money, or saving buyers a bundle.

Let's say you're selling your PlayStation 3 on eBay to raise money for grandma's kidney operation, except in the item description you accidentally type "PlayStaion 3," a typo so common I've actually programmed my spellchecker to auto-correct it.

That missing "t" means anyone doing an eBay search for the game console by its proper name won't see your listing. Sure, it'll still show up in the right category and whatnot, but most eBay users just type the name of whatever they're looking for into the search bar and go from there.

Fewer people seeing a listing means fewer bids, which in turn means a lower selling price. Bad news for the seller, but it can be a real boon for a buyer who stumbles across one of these listings, isolated from the herd like a wounded gazelle. Easy prey.

The people behind the DealLocker.com website (which has the particularly useful "Amazon secret discount finder" tool) have seized upon this phenomenon with a new site called TypoBuddy.com.

TypoBuddy allows you to search eBay, Amazon and your local Craigslist classified ads for pretty much any item you can think of. The trick is, it takes your search term and converts it into dozens upon dozens of typo-plagued variations, in the hopes of coming across a mostly unnoticed listing for that "Volkswagon Jetta" or "expresso machine" that you're looking for.

It's a cool idea, if not exactly revolutionary - canny eBay buyers have been doing deliberate typo searches for years in hopes of scoring sweet deals.

The only problem with TypoBuddy is that the more popular it becomes, the less effective it will be. If everyone is suddenly doing blanket searches for "PlayStaion 3" and "PlayDtation 3" and the other 75 variations TypoBuddy comes up with, the competition for those auctions will spike and the bargains will start to disappear.

So it might be a good idea to keep this one to yourself. And don't go writing about it in a newspaper or anything, because then ... oops. Um, anyone up for lunch? I've got a hankering for some children.

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