

COMPUTER GURU — by Don Benjamin

The Donald and Nancy Light Technology and Literacy Lab Programs

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Be Careful When You Search for Technical Help

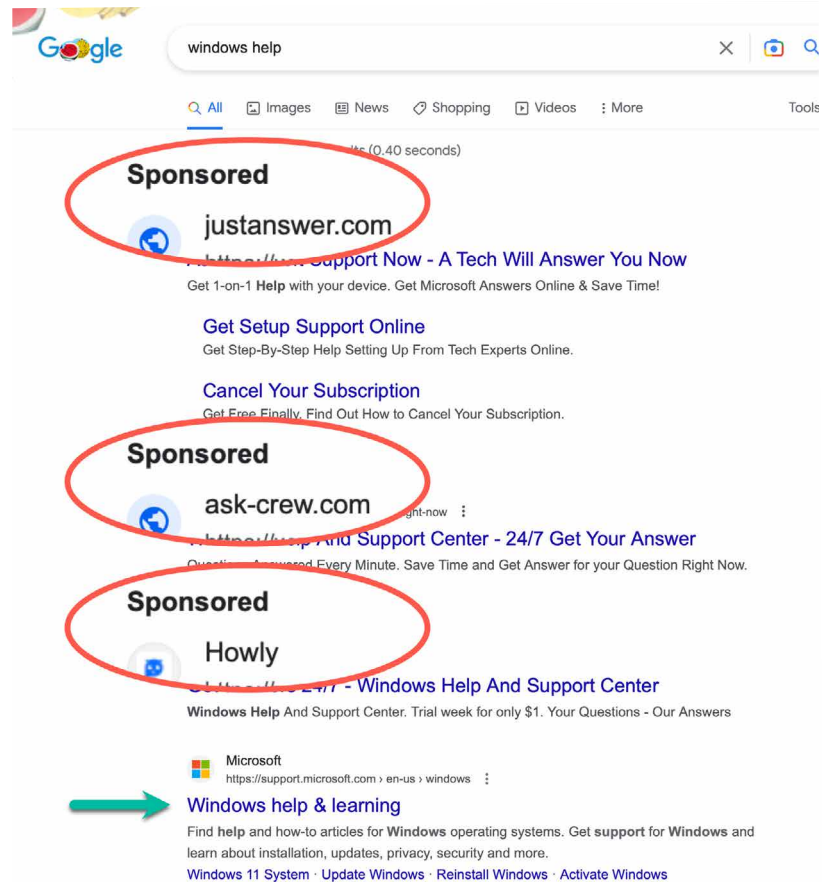
Google's uncanny ability to serve up what we're looking for often lists "sponsored" websites that could be deceptive.

Some twenty-five years ago, Google assumed the reins from AltaVista as the premier search "engine."¹ Using its ingenious "page rank" algorithm, Google returns search results in milliseconds and with uncanny accuracy. It's as if the Google people know precisely what we're looking for because the results are usually at the top of the list! And for free!

But, alas, few things are really "free" on the internet. For example, while you and I don't pay Google when we use its search engine, companies who want their websites to appear at the top of Google's search results do, which means you can't assume the first few results are what you're looking for. **This is especially important when you're seeking technical help because some websites may offer services that require a service charge while others may be scams.**

For instance, note the screenshot of the list Google returned when I searched for "Windows Help." The top three websites in Google's list are **sponsored** by various non-Microsoft companies that provide (or claim to provide) Windows help.

All three sites (Justanswer.com, Ask-crew.com, and Howly) require a subscription and fee and may or may not be Microsoft experts. They may be fine, but I wanted the official Microsoft site, which is the fourth item on the list.



Tips for safe searches

1. Don't assume the search results at the top of a Google list are what you're looking for.
2. Remember that sponsored websites may or may not be listed first and may or may not be the "official" website you want. Official company websites usually include the name of the company, like hp.com, microsoft.com, or apple.com, in their website address.
3. Bypass Google and enter the URL of the site you want directly into the address bar. For example, www.microsoft.com or www.hp.com. Then search on those official websites for what you want.
4. **Never call "800" numbers for advice unless you are certain who you are talking to.**

If you need technical help, our volunteer tech team may be just the ticket. Just fill out the nifty help request at <https://princetonsenior.wufoo.com/forms/technology-assistance-request/>.

¹ A "search engine" is a website that provides a list of other websites based on the topic you're searching for.