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Google Tricked into Serving Scam Amazon Ads

For hours on Thursday, the top Google search result for "Amazon" was pointed to a scam site. The bad ad appeared at the very top of the search result for anyone searching for the internet retail giant -- even above the legitimate search result for Amazon.com. Anyone who clicked on the ad was sent to a page that tried to trick the user into calling a number for fear that their computer was infected with malware -- and not sent to Amazon.com as they would have hoped. The page presents itself as an official Apple or Windows support page, depending on the type of computer you're visiting the page from. An analysis of the webpage's code showed that anyone trying to dismiss the popup box on the page would likely trigger the browser expanding to full-screen, giving the appearance of ransomware. It's at least the second time in two years that Google has served up a malicious ad under Amazon's name. Over the past year, we've heard of several cases of bad ads that have redirected users to malicious pages, but to our knowledge have never directly served malware. The malicious domain -- which we are not publishing -- was registered by GoDaddy, likely with fake information. The apparent domain owner didn't respond to our inquiries. The FTC has for years squashed tech support scams that often result in malware or ransomware being installed on your computer, and used as leverage to force victims to pay up to have the malware removed. Google, one of the largest advertisers on the internet, said this week that it took down more than three billion bad ads last year, and banned 320,000 publishers from its ad network for violating its terms.