

Here is the 23 November 2009 email (with added screenshots) that Foundem sent to Google's Head of Search Quality, Matt Cutts, during the six week dialogue leading up to Foundem's manual "whitelisting" by Google on 1 December 2009.

...Google's email of November 20 highlighted a selection of examples from Foundem's site that Google suggested were "not meeting [Google's] Webmaster guidelines as to content and quality".

Foundem has now addressed all of the issues raised. Wherever possible, we have implemented general solutions that go well beyond the specific examples mentioned. The changes went Live on the morning of November 22.

We trust that Google will now make whatever adjustments are necessary to ensure that "the way in which Google assesses the content and quality" of Foundem's pages allows Foundem to once again rank normally, on a level-playing-field with its competitors.

Please find below a detailed breakdown of the issues Google raised and how Foundem has addressed them.

Issue 1: Cutting Off Descriptions Mid-Word

e.g. "moves organically, explo" and "companion guide, training lea..."

Mid-word Truncations on Foundem

The two examples raised have two separate and unrelated causes. The first comes directly from the merchant's data, while the second results from Foundem's own automated truncation algorithm—hence the "inconsistency".

First Example: "moves organically, explo"

The example quoted was:

*With Pleo you can expand your family with a pet from prehistoric times! Pleo is a one-week-old dinosaur that will quickly grow to become one of the most fun and exciting members of your family. This amazing robotic marvel not only moves organically, **explo***

This is an example of a merchant, in this case Littlewoods, including truncated words at the end of some of the descriptions in its product feed. In other words, this mid-word truncation came directly from the Littlewoods product feed. Any price comparison site using this feed and displaying the product description field will therefore faithfully reproduce this truncation. Possibly the only exception to this is now Foundem. We have now added special functionality that can be enabled for any merchant, which detects this kind of mid-word truncation and automatically tidies it up by backing up to the previous word boundary (within reason). So, the Littlewoods example now looks like this:

With Pleo you can expand your family with a pet from prehistoric times! Pleo is a one-week-old dinosaur that will quickly grow to become one of the most fun and exciting members of your family. This amazing robotic marvel not only moves organically,...

Second Example: “companion guide, training lea...”

The example text quoted is no longer there, but would have looked similar to:

*PLEO Robotic Dinosaur AS SEEN ON THE APPRENTICE! Can a long-extinct species be resurrected? UGOBE designers and engineers studied the long extinct Camarasaurus, a dinosaur from the Jurassic period. Pleo, a UGOBE Life Form is the authentic recreation born from that study. UGOBE’s designers and engineers recreated Pleo’s physiology from the fossils of the original. His height and weight are **cons...***

This was an example of our automated text truncation algorithm, which automatically truncates overly long descriptions. We have now amended this algorithm to apply any automatic truncations to the nearest previous word boundary (within reason). So, the above example now looks like this:

PLEO Robotic Dinosaur AS SEEN ON THE APPRENTICE! Can a long-extinct species be resurrected? UGOBE designers and engineers studied the long extinct Camarasaurus, a dinosaur from the Jurassic period. Pleo, a UGOBE Life Form is the authentic recreation born from that study. UGOBE’s designers and engineers recreated Pleo’s physiology from the fossils of the original. His height and weight are...

Mid-word Truncations on Other Price Comparison Sites

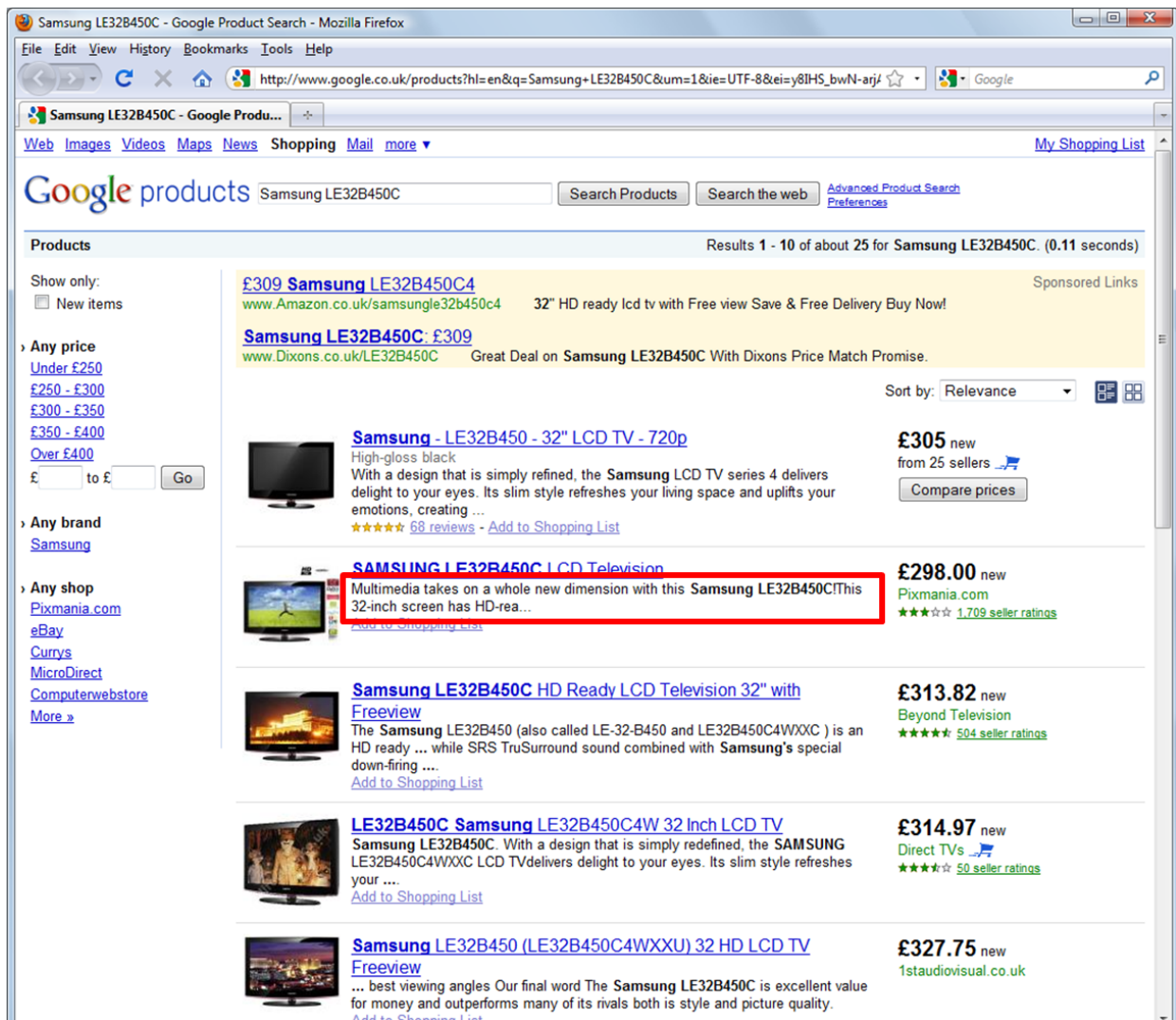
Mid-word truncation issues are not unique to Foundem, although Foundem may now be unique in having virtually eliminated them. The examples below demonstrate that such mid-word truncations are commonplace among all leading price comparison sites. In particular, Google’s own Product Search results exhibit similar mid-word truncations (see below).

It seems that Foundem is, therefore, being held to a higher standard than its competitors, and to that of Google’s own price comparison service. For example:

Note that all of the examples throughout this document are representative. We have gathered a selection of examples to illustrate that the same issues can easily be found on other leading price comparison services. We believe it would be relatively straightforward to find similar examples of all of the issues Google mentioned in all of the leading price comparison sites.

1. Google Product Search:

*Multimedia takes on a whole new dimension with this Samsung LE32B450C!This 32-inch screen has **HD-rea...***

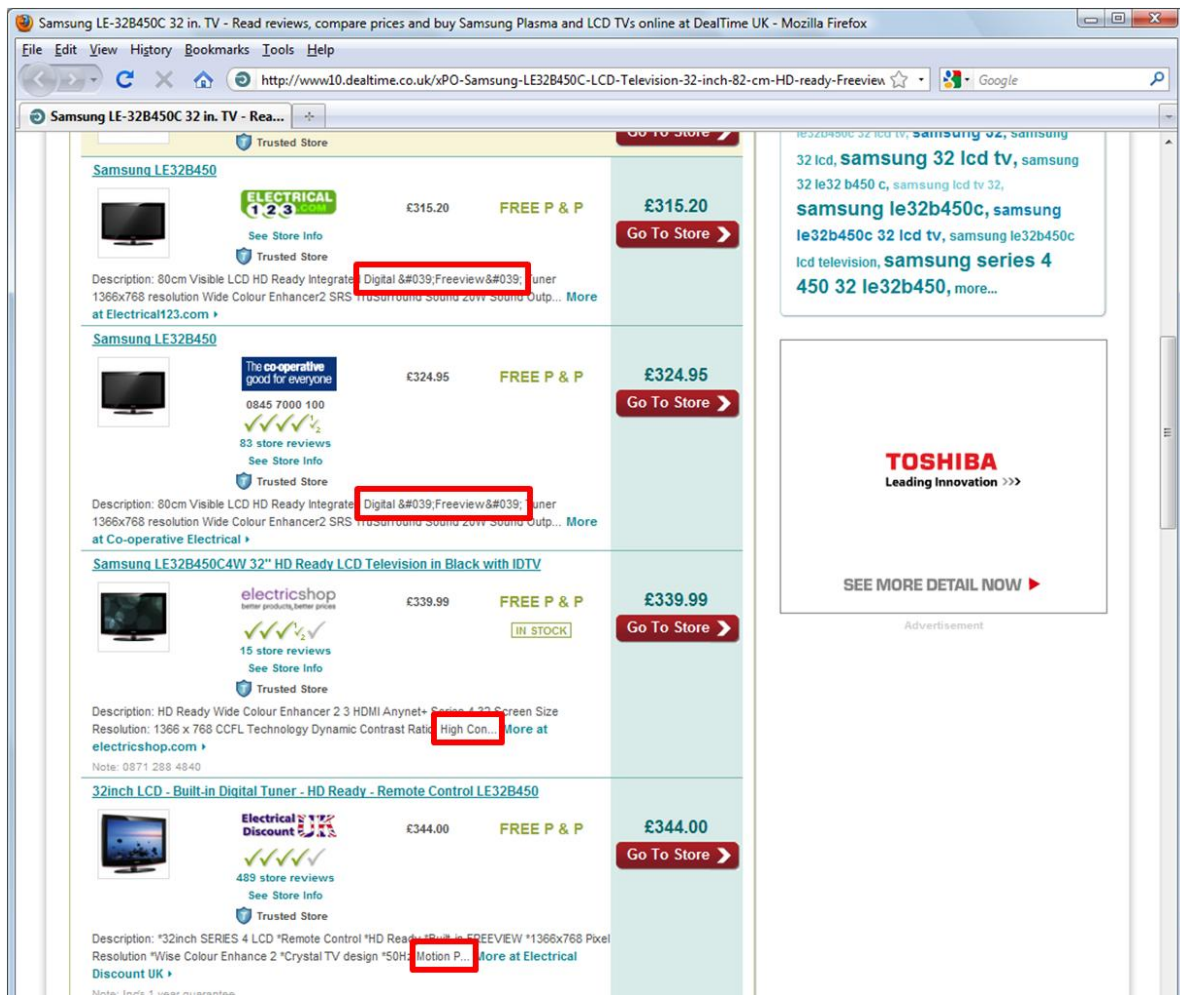


Screenshot of Google Product Search from 21 November 2009

In addition to a mid-word truncation, the above example is repeated twice and also exhibits the quality issue you refer to as “packaging descriptions”, e.g. “LE32B450C!This”.

2. Dealttime:

Description: 80cm Visible LCD HD Ready Integrated Digital 'Freeview' Tuner 1366x768 resolution Wide Colour Enhancer2 SRS TruSurround Sound 20W Sound **Outp...**



Screenshot of Dealtime from 21 November 2009

Notice that the above is not only truncated at a non-word boundary, but also contains some incorrectly escaped quote characters around Freeview.

Also on the same page:

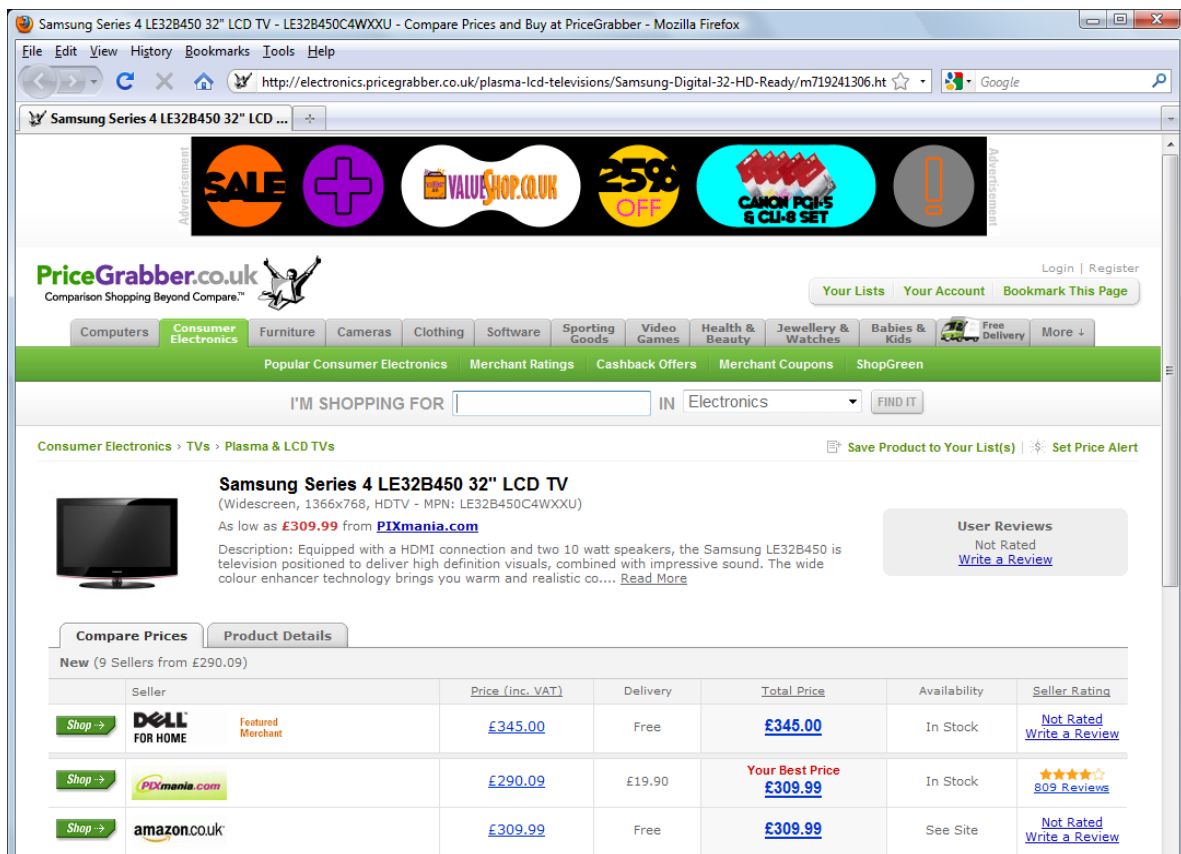
*Description: HD Ready Wide Colour Enhancer 2 3 HDMI Anynet+ Series 4 32 Screen Size
Resolution: 1366 x 768 CCFL Technology Dynamic Contrast Ratio: **High Con...***

And

*Description: *32inch SERIES 4 LCD *Remote Control *HD Ready *Built-in FREEVIEW *1366x768
Pixel Resolution *Wise Colour Enhance 2 *Crystal TV™ design *50Hz Motion P...*

3. PriceGrabber:

*Description: Equipped with a HDMI connection and two 10 watt speakers, the Samsung LE32B450 is television positioned to deliver high definition visuals, combined with impressive sound. The wide colour enhancer technology brings you warm and **realistic co...***



Screenshot of PriceGrabber from 21 November 2009

Issue 2: Sentence Concatenation (“Packaging Descriptions”)

e.g. “like?We”, “animals.Requires”, and “original!Gone”

Sentence Concatenation on Foundem

This kind of issue stems directly from the content as it appears on the merchants’ websites (or in some cases as it appears in their product feeds). As a search service, our preference in nearly all cases is to present a merchant’s data exactly as it occurs on the merchant’s website.

It seems that Google is suggesting that Foundem be responsible for the quality of content on the sites we search. We challenge this principle. Where would Google have us draw the line? Should we also correct a merchant’s spelling mistakes? How about grammatical errors?

However, in good faith, we have now implemented and deployed functionality that allows us to detect and automatically tidy-up the vast majority of these issues, and our pages are now virtually free of all such examples.

The Foundem examples quoted were:

*Let's look at the animals on the cubes. What are their names and what do they sound like?We can put the right one in the square when the voice asks us to. What a clever way to find out all about the different kinds of **animals.Requires**: 2x AAA Batteries*

And

Having undergone a 21st- century makeover, that icon of the 70s that puzzling, frustrating, and rewarding cube is back! Similar to the Rubik's cube of your youth, this machine is an electronic

version very similar to the **original!Gone** are those infuriating little segments that have to be twisted first this way and then that; replaced instead by a series of buttons that automatically move...

These issues from the merchant's site are now automatically detected and corrected, so that it appears on Foundem as:

Let's look at the animals on the cubes. What are their names and what do they sound like? We can put the right one in the square when the voice asks us to. What a clever way to find out all about the different kinds of animals. Requires: 2x AAA Batteries

And:

Having undergone a 21st- century makeover, that icon of the 70s that puzzling, frustrating, and rewarding cube is back! Similar to the Rubik's cube of your youth, this machine is an electronic version very similar to the original! Gone are those infuriating little segments that have to be twisted first this way and then that; replaced instead by a series of buttons that automatically move...

Sentence Concatenation on Other Price Comparison Sites and in Google Search Results

Again, the issue Google has highlighted was not unique to Foundem. On the contrary, such issues are commonplace, as the examples below illustrate. Indeed, Google's own natural search and Product Search results exhibit identical issues.

It seems that, once again, Foundem is being held to a higher standard than its competitors and that of Google's own services. For example:

Google's Natural Search Results:

[Games, Puzzles & Learning - Puzzle Cubes - Shopping - Virgin Media](#)

*What a clever way to find out all about the different kinds of **animals.Requires: 2x AAA Batteries.** Category: Games, Puzzles & Learning ...*

www.virginmedia.com/shopping/product.php?p_id=30521886 - Cached

[Puzzle Cubes - Baby and Children product information at ...](#)

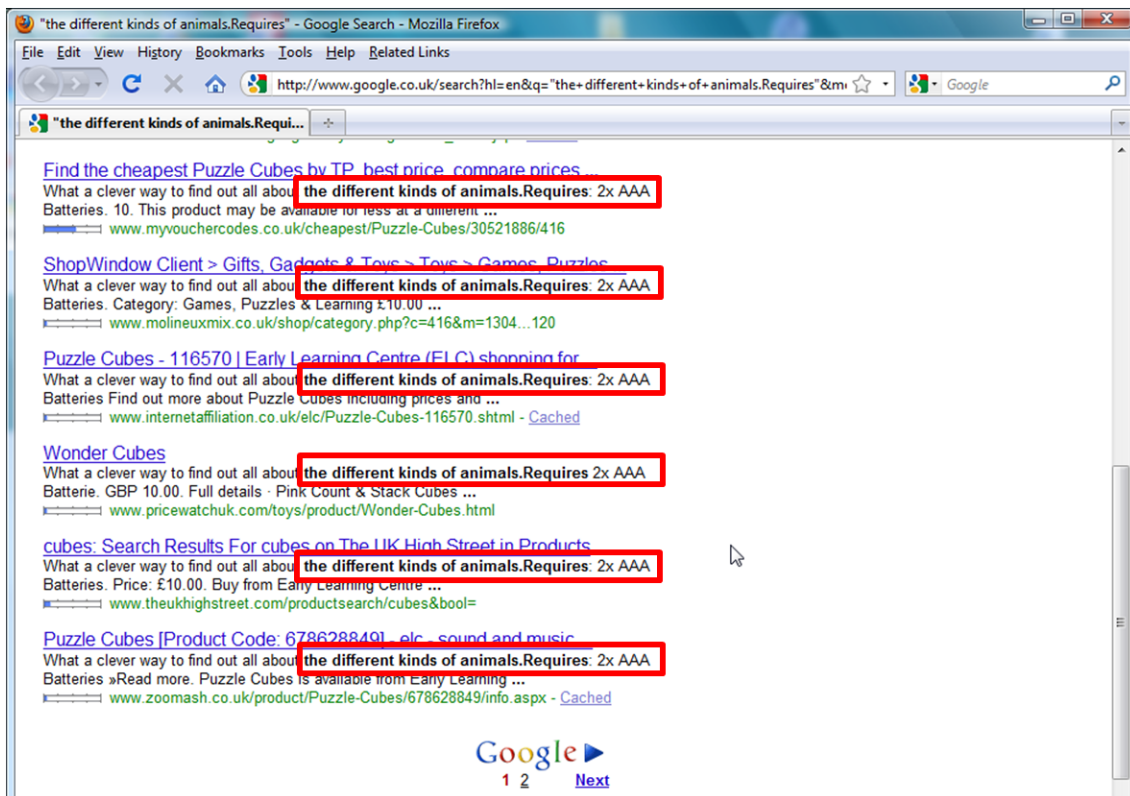
*What a clever way to find out all about the different kinds of **animals.requires 2x aaa batteries** We only have limited information and details for this ...*

www.flexyourplastic.co.uk/productsearch/childrensshops/products.php?q...

[The UK High Street : Products from Early Learning Centre](#)

*What a clever way to find out all about the different kinds of **animals.Requires: 2x AAA Batteries.** Price: £10.00 Buy from Early Learning Centre ...*

www.theukhighstreet.com/perl/products.cgi?ID=1177;nh=4



Screenshot of Google's Natural Search Results from 21 November 2009

Google Product Search Example 1:

This page illustrates several instances of the same kind of problem, including:

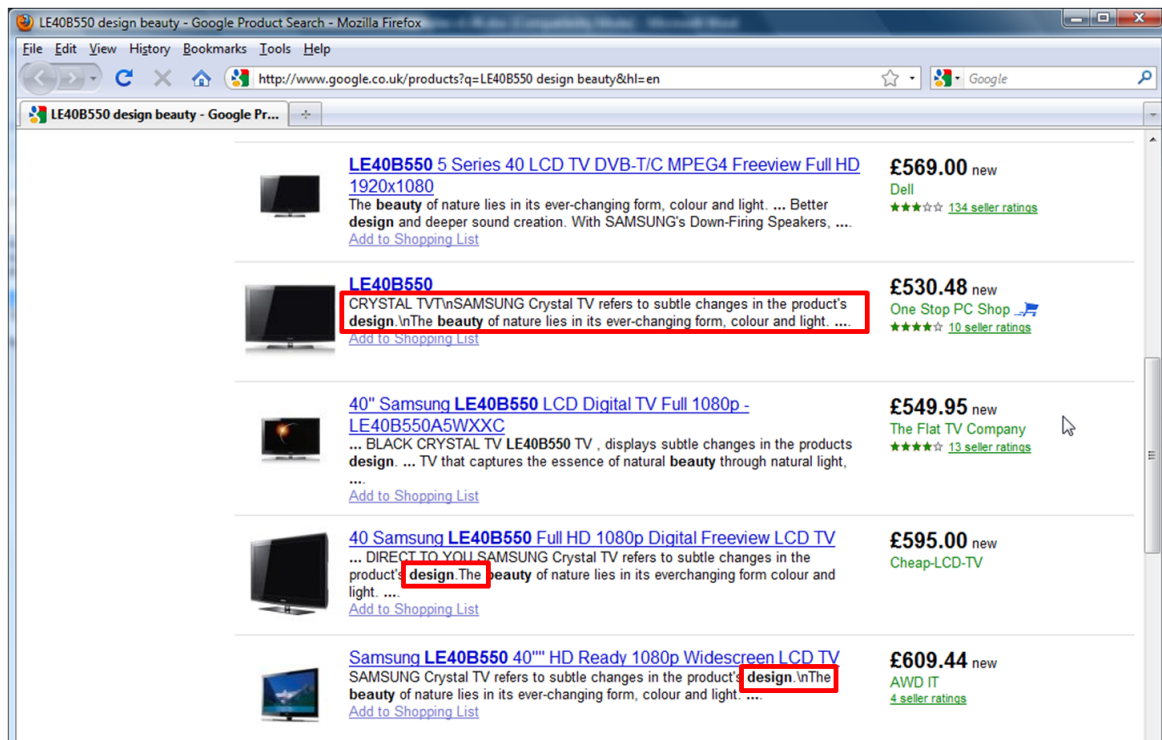
... *DIRECT TO YOU SAMSUNG Crystal TV refers to subtle changes in the product's **design**.The beauty of nature lies in its everchanging form colour and light.*

Note that the following snippet sheds light on the underlying source of some of the concatenated sentence problems, e.g., incorrectly handled carriage return escape sequences ("`\n`"):

*CRYSTAL **TV\nSAMSUNG** Crystal TV refers to subtle changes in the product's **design**.**\n**The beauty of nature lies in its ever-changing form, colour and light.*

And:

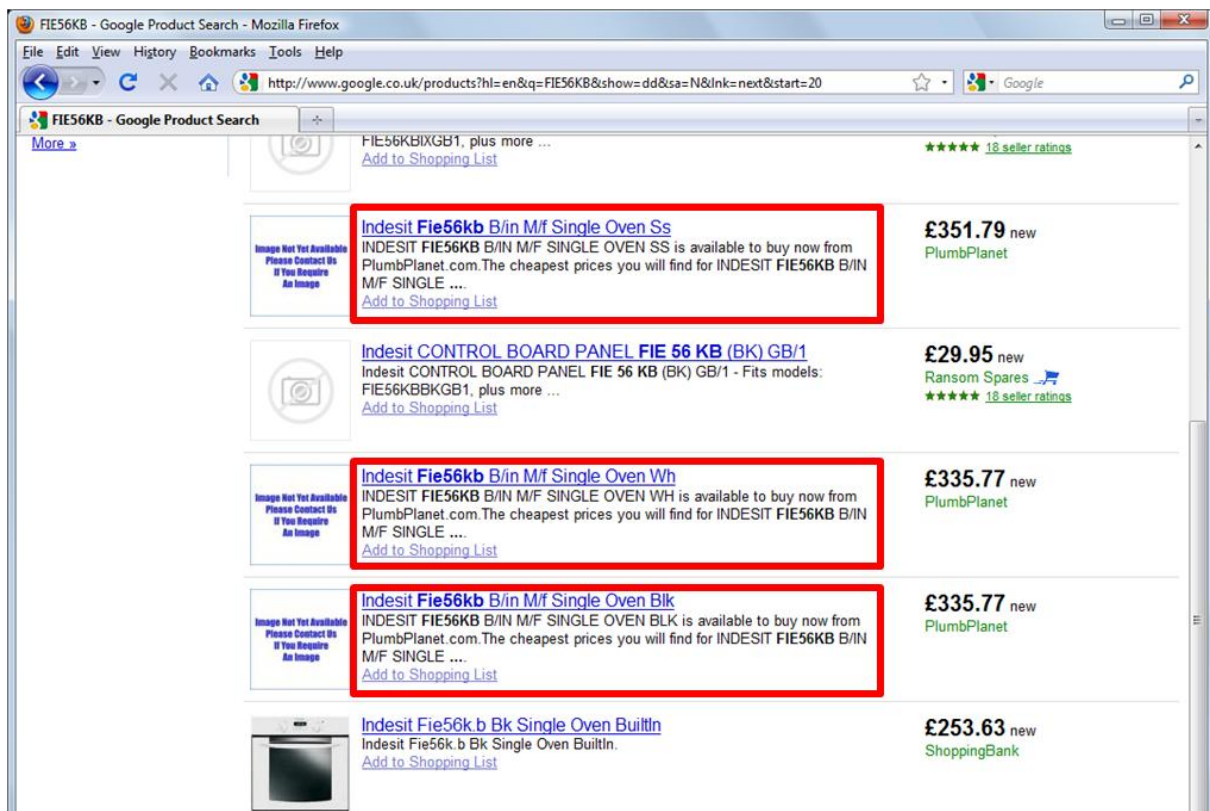
*"LE40B550 FHD PLATINUM BLACK CRYSTAL **TV™**The Samsung LE40B550 LCD television ... The beauty of nature lies in its ever-changing form, colour and light.*



Screenshot of Google Product Search from 21 November 2009

Google Product Search Example 2:

INDESIT FIE56KB B/IN M/F SINGLE OVEN WH is available to buy now from PlumbPlanet.com. The cheapest prices you will find for INDESIT FIE56KB B/IN M/F SINGLE



Screenshot of Google Product Search from 21 November 2009

From Ciao.co.uk:

32 "Resolution 1366 x 768 **PixelsHD-Ready YesTV** tuner **integratedSCART** ports quantity 1HDMI ports quantity 1Colour

From Bizrate.co.uk:

*Having undergone a 21st- century makeover, that icon of the 70s that puzzling, frustrating, and rewarding cube is back! Similar to the Rubik's cube of your youth, this machine is an electronic version very similar to the **original!Gone** are those...*

And another from Bizrate:

*Help yourself to chilled water from the indoor **dispenser.A** energy rated. 245 litres*

From Kelkoo :

*This offer includes : **DescriptionPrice** New Apple iPod Classic, 160GB, **Silver?189.00** Gear4 CDB-50 Portable CD...*

Issue 3: General Snippets Quality

e.g., "%TYPEOF_BATTERIES_REQUIRED%", "H 105, w 100, d 78cms", and the repetition of duplicate descriptions.

This is a varied and controversial collection of issues, and again all of them—far from being unique to Foundem—affect all price comparison services.

3.1 Google's "%TYPEOF_BATTERIES_REQUIRED%" Example:

The description Google quotes from Foundem's Tesco Direct result is exactly as it appears on Tesco Direct's site:

Foundem's Tesco Direct Result	Tesco Direct
With four modes of play, Baby Counting Pal musically introduces counting and colours, while offering a variety of classical and other musical styles. It has an assortment of tactile activities and includes a butterfly rattle and crinkly bees. It requires %TYPEOF_BATTERIES_REQUIRED% batteries and is suitable for age range 3 months+.	With four modes of play, Baby Counting Pal musically introduces counting and colours, while offering a variety of classical and other musical styles. It has an assortment of tactile activities and includes a butterfly rattle and crinkly bees. It requires %TYPEOF_BATTERIES_REQUIRED% batteries and is suitable for age range 3 months+.

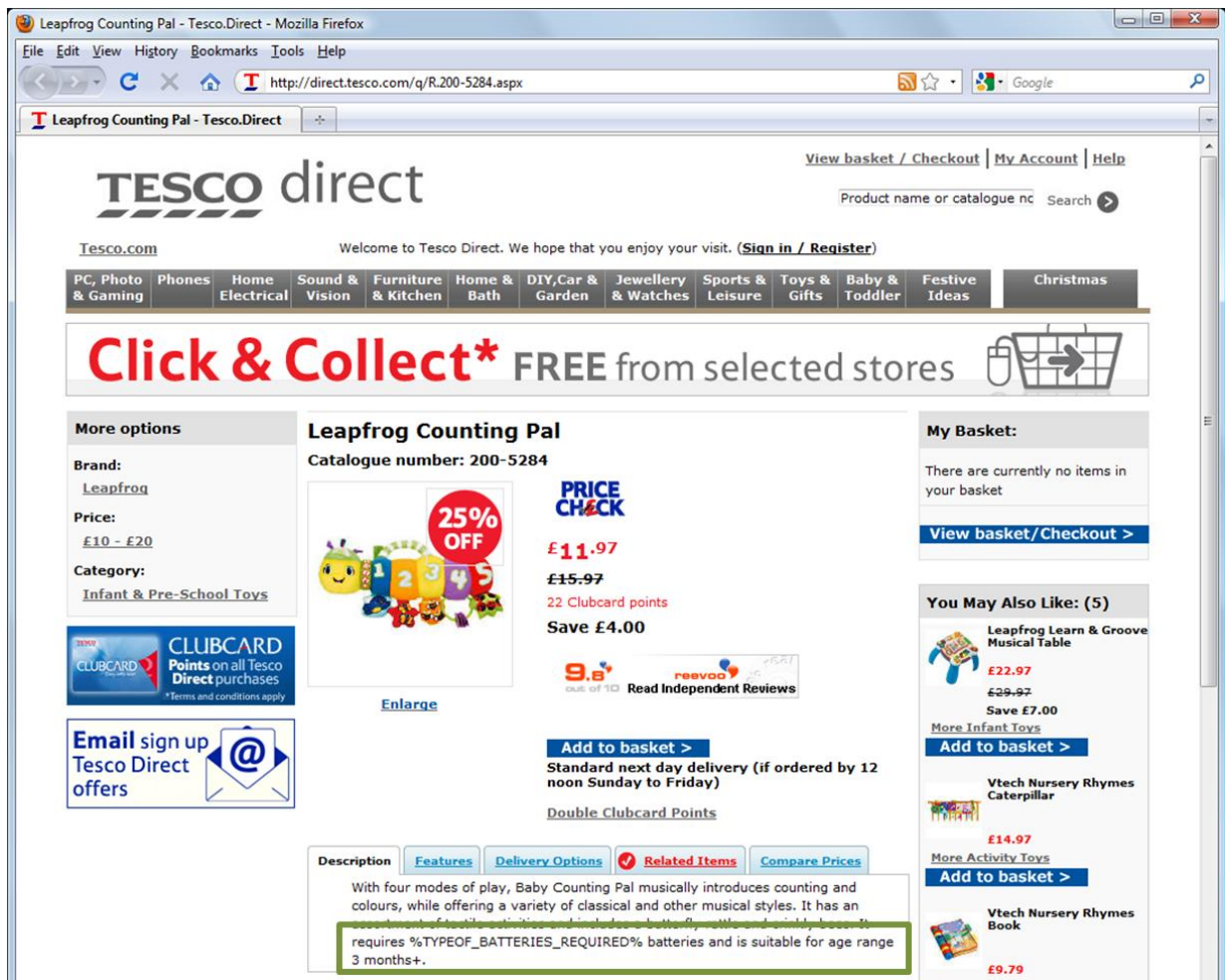


Figure 1: Screenshot of Tesco Direct, taken 21 November 2009

Who is to say that “%TYPEOF_BATTERIES_REQUIRED%” isn’t the name of the latest must-have Video Game? It seems unlikely, but then a video game was launched recently under the title “AaaaaAAaaaAAAAaAAAAaAAAAA: A Reckless Disregard for Gravity”.

Unsurprisingly, the same “%TYPEOF_BATTERIES_REQUIRED%” text appears on several other un-penalized Price Comparison sites. For example:

From Jellydeal.co.uk:

*The %**BRAND_OR_SUPPLIER**% Cosmic Light 3 wheeled scooter features an adjustable handlebar system that grows with your child and is foldable for easy storage. This boys' scooter has removable grips and comes with a light up flashing deck that makes it more visible to drivers at night. It has an aluminium frame, rear brake and PU wheels. Suitable for age range 3 years+ and requires %**TYPEOF_BATTERIES_REQUIRED**% batteries.*

Again, in good faith and to demonstrate Foundem’s willingness to comply with all of Google’s suggestions for quality improvement (however counter to Foundem’s philosophy of intelligent automation), we have taken the step of hard-coding the removal of this specific text.

Foundem’s Tesco Direct result now reads:

With four modes of play, Baby Counting Pal musically introduces counting and colours, while offering a variety of classical and other musical styles. It has an assortment of tactile activities and

includes a butterfly rattle and crinkly bees. It requires batteries and is suitable for age range 3 months+.

3.2 Google's "H 105, w 100, d 78cms" Example:

This one is puzzling. This text is clearly a product dimension, which is almost always useful information. Not surprisingly, therefore, Foundem and every other price comparison site routinely includes this pattern of text. For example:

From Shopping.com:

*Quick and easy to assemble. Pop-up and insert rods are suitable for indoor or outdoor use. **H 105, w 100, d 78cms**. Age: from 2 years.*

From NextTag :

*Quick and easy to assemble, pop up and insert rods suitable for indoor or outdoor use hours of active fun and adventure. Folds compactly for easy storage. **H 105, w 100, d 78cms**.*

From Kelkoo :

*Integrated 2 tier glass table. Textoline fabric. Intergrated parasol hole. **H 100, w 157, d 70cms**. Copper.*

And this from Google Product Search:

*McCord Cuba double bed Stunning new design. **H 100, w 146, d 197cms**. Oak or walnut.*

However, if Google insists that we remove all such dimensional text from Foundem, regardless of its utility and common usage, then we can do so with a simple regular expression. Please let us know if you would like us to activate this.

3.3 Google's Repeated Description Text ("Figures from the movie ..." repeated six times in a row) Example:

Repeated Descriptions on Foundem

Again, in good faith, and to demonstrate Foundem's willingness to comply with all of Google's suggestions for quality improvement (however counter to Foundem's core philosophy of comprehensiveness), we have enabled our "de-duplication" feature for Foundem's Gadget & Toy domain.

This functionality was developed some time ago and allows Foundem to selectively enable—on a domain by domain basis—the automated de-duping of descriptions on a page. When enabled, only one instance of an identical description will be shown on the page, regardless of how many merchants actually use it.

As a search service, our preference in nearly all cases is to summarise each merchant's data exactly as it occurs on their website. If Currys, Dixons, and PC World all offer the same product with the same description (but often with different prices and availability), then we want our users to know that. In this way, they can make informed decisions based on all of the available information. It may be of interest to a user to know that the three merchant sites have identical product descriptions; perhaps the stores are related? It is potentially misleading to hide all but one description. However, to show willing, we have implemented the change.

Repeated Descriptions on Other Price Comparison Sites

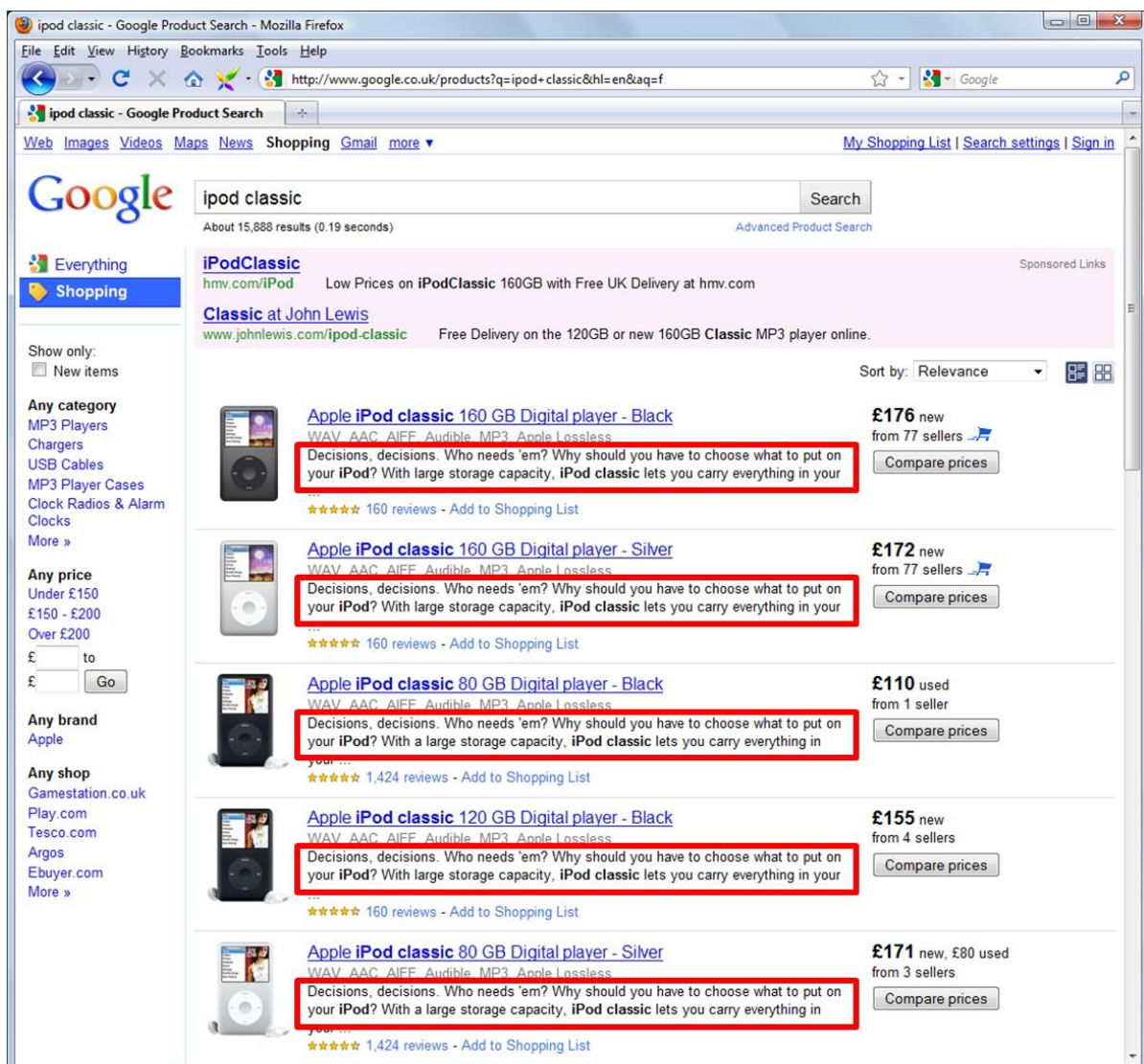
As with all of the previous issues, this issue is far from unique to Foundem. Every price comparison service, including Google's own, will feature repetition where repetition exists in the merchants' data, as illustrated below.

Again it seems that Foundem is being held to a higher standard than its competitors, including Google's own price comparison service. For example:

1. Google Product Search:

Fusing 12.3-megapixel image quality and a cinematic 24fps D-Movie Mode, the Nikon D90 exceeds the demands of passionate photographers.

The above text is repeated six times in a row (and the page offers several different price comparisons for the same Nikon D90 camera).



Screenshot of Google Product Search

2. From **Kelkoo.co.uk** :

*Nikon proudly presents the latest addition to its range **oftop** end cameras, the D90! The D90 is a master of...*

The above text is repeated five times in a row.

3. From **Ciao.co.uk**:

Taking great pictures is easier than ever with the DSC-W270 Cyber-shot digital camera. The ...

The above text is repeated seven times in a row.

Conclusion

Foundem has now addressed all of the issues raised.

We have also provided examples demonstrating that all of the issues raised are commonplace among all leading price comparison services. It is especially noteworthy that Google's own Product Search service contains examples of every issue that Google has raised in relation to Foundem.

Google says that it needs to ensure that Foundem is "meeting the same guidelines that all sites have to meet". It seems that Foundem has, in fact, been asked to exceed this standard by some considerable margin.

We hope that Google will now expedite whatever adjustments are necessary to allow Foundem to once again rank normally on a level playing field with its competitors.