

## **Google Search has obliterated local, Australian expertise and independent journalism – Nick Ross ACCC submission**

### **Introduction**

I have been a technology journalist and digital publisher for 20 years. Several of those were spent as a full-time digital marketer (part-time journo) with a speciality in SEO. As such, I've been monitoring my sites' and other sites' search performance religiously for almost a decade and I believe my insights will, subsequently, be particularly important for this inquiry.

I've a wealth of screenshots and evidence which pertains to my industry but, for the sake of brevity, I'll use my own site 'High Performance Laptops' - <https://highperformancelaptops.com.au/> - as an example and stick with some of the most-recent, core issues.

I believe that Google is now seriously abusing its monopoly position as a Search provider and that, as one of the planet's most important information disseminators, it is critical that this be addressed. The following observations, testing and evidence is polarised through a lens of technology journalism and publishing, but it doesn't take much effort to see that the issues I've personally been facing in this space are mirrored across the entire world of Google Search.

### **The main issues**

For at least 18 months, Google has been making its Search Engine Results Pages more and more hostile to independent Australian journalists to the point where its most recent March 2024 update has wiped many of them out.

Google makes many claims about what a site needs to do to rank on its SERPs and has also offered many workshops to Australian journalists and publishers to 'help' them increase their audience.

I've been part of most of these initiatives and workshops and have spent countless hours going through all the rules and requirements, ensuring that my sites are compliant and ensuring that I perform best practice. I've spent many weeks learning the most-intricate technical details myself (I already had a head start as a technical SEO) and have spent money on employing people to help where I've needed it.

This has meant I've needed to be proficient in high-quality content creation, coding and also web-publishing practices – three distinct different industries.

However, even when you succeed in these areas, it's become clear that Google's SERPs do not reflect its own claims. I've won major awards for my writing and Google's own tools say my site is technically well optimised - and yet total garbage consistently ranks ahead of it. This has got worse and worse over the past 18 months to the point where, all

that remains, is the absolute opposite of unique and useful content that Google promised. In many instances, results point directly to Google's own products, partners and high-spending advertisers instead.

Either Google has corrupted its important Organic SERPs with commercial offerings, or its latest update is broken.

Google won't respond to questions about fixing it. While I have made Google's own speech about being fair to everyone to many clients and colleagues over the years, what we're seeing now in the results simply doesn't reflect that anymore.

I've dealt with multiple people within Google about all of this and it has got to the point where I feel gaslighted – everyone points to another team and says they can't help. One Google employee even said that Google Australia has no influence on the world of Google Search which I find very hard to believe considering I covered its launch in this country, the size of its footprint in Australia is massive plus, it helped invent Google Maps. It should be simple for Google Australia to point out the following issues with Google Search.

### **The Google News Initiative (GNI)**

While not directly linked to Google Search, Google itself has proclaimed multiple times that the GNI has helped journalists and publishers. Its mission statement says, "The Google News Initiative works with publishers and journalists to fight misinformation, share resources and build a diverse and innovative news ecosystem."

That's not what Google News results show.

Having attended online sessions for this initiative, I don't believe it offered any practical advice or help in any way. The presenter repeatedly stressed that they wouldn't help participants appear on Google Search or in Google News. The drop-out rate was huge – only three of my (initially large) group made it to the end and all of us felt like the help we needed was not forthcoming. In the later sessions, we had to wait over 30 minutes to see if anyone else would show up.

The course focussed upon using Google Analytics 4, implementing Google Ads and spoon-feeding the benefits of building an audience using newsletters, sign-up forms and also social media. The latter will represent painfully obvious recommendations to any experienced publisher.

For Google Ads, we were told that we wouldn't have access to the full version of Google Ad Manager, which actually lets you control which ads appear and how much they're charged (I've managed this for other large publishers before), and that we had to pay another approved organisation to do it for us if we wanted to use it. If we didn't use that we had to use regular Google AdSense – which pays pennies to sites with Australian traffic levels.

After the course I was asked, on two separate occasions, to write positive feedback about the course but I pointed out that I couldn't because my traffic had only gone down since starting it, they'd done nothing to get my content on Google News and the fact they were pushing advice that Google's technical tools were telling me not to do, meant that I couldn't.

That final point is key to the following...

### **Page Speed Insights (PSI)**

Google says its [PSI tool](#) tells you whether you're using best practice when publishing and that this matters for Google SERPs. I have spent so much time and effort optimising for these metrics (over the past 18 months) that my ability to work has seriously suffered.

Google's GNI advice conflicts with the advice given by the Google's PSI results. Furthermore, the effect on Google SERP ranking appears to be near zero...

**Firstly:** If you add any of the following to your website, Page Speed Insights will flag them as problems in its diagnostics (I've tested this to pieces):

Google Analytics

Google Tag Manager

Google AdSense

Newsletter sign-up forms

Social Media Buttons

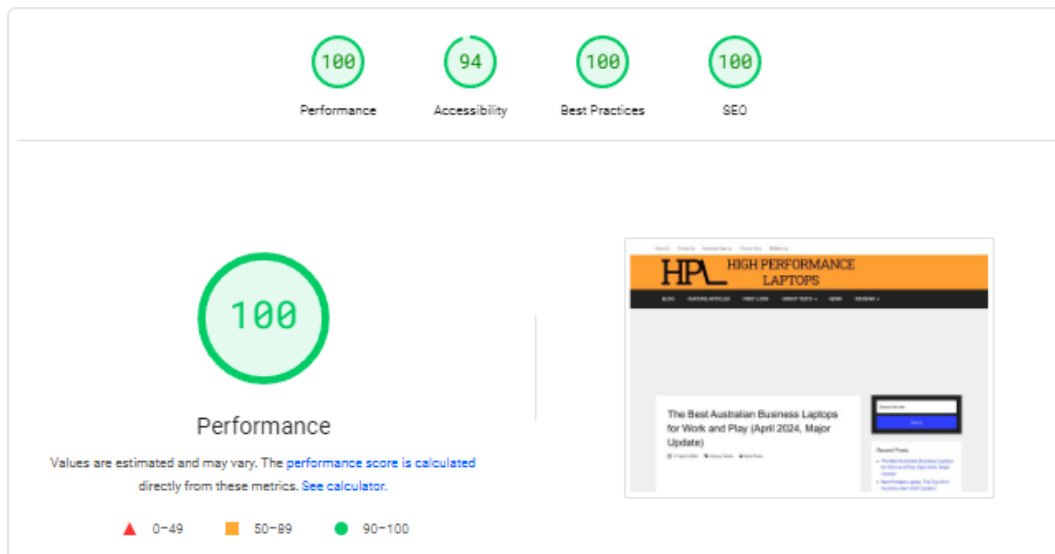
Basic Wordpress features like Tags, Related Articles and Author Boxes

**Secondly:** After significant time and expense (we're talking months) I got my scores all max'ed out. I had to remove ALL of the above except Google Analytics which I needed. My scores were all 100/100 (or very near to that). Notably, Google also gives me a 100/100 score for SEO.

Despite this green light from Google itself, my site now doesn't rank on Google's SERPs anymore and every other page fails these tests – often dramatically.

Here are my most recent scores from Page Speed Insights:

Diagnose performance issues



Now: Here are the scores for the what Google DOES Rank when searching for “High Performance Laptops”

**JB Hi-Fi**  
https://www.jbhifi.com.au › Computers › Laptops

### Best Performance Laptops - JB Hi-Fi

**Performance laptops** · Intel Core i714 · Intel Core Ultra 710 · Intel Core i98 · AMD Ryzen 75 · Intel Core Ultra 94 · Apple M2 Max1 · Apple M2 Pro1 · Inte...



**PCMag**  
https://www.pcmag.com › Best Products › Laptops

### The Fastest Laptops for 2024

Lenovo Legion 9i Gen 8. Fastest Cost-Is-No-Object **Laptop** · \$3,146.40 ;  
Asus ROG Strix Scar 18. Fastest **High-End Gaming Laptop** · \$3,949.99 ;...



### People also ask :

Which laptop is best for overall performance?



What is a high performance laptop?



Which laptop is best for high performance computing?



What is the highest performance laptop in the world?



Feedback

**The Verge**  
https://www.theverge.com › best-laptops

### The best laptops you can get

5 Apr 2024 — Our current pick for the **best laptop** is the MacBook Air M3. It's a device that does just about everything right. While it's certainly not ...



**Metabox**  
https://www.metabox.com.au › store › High-Performan...

### High Performance Laptops | METABOX Australia

From complex mathematical models to intensive virtual machines, Metabox **High Performance Laptops** are powered for the worlds most advanced an...



**Dell**  
https://www.dell.com › ... › High Performance Laptops

### High Performance Laptops - Dell XPS & Inspiron ...

Learn about versatile & powerful **laptops**. Explore **high-performing** XPS & Inspiron **laptops** designed to tackle all tasks in a sleek modern design.



### Position 1. JB Hi-Fi online store (and major advertiser)



Performance



Accessibility



Best Practices



SEO

Position 2. PCMag Australia – Affiliate marketing page of the Aussie version of a major international publication



Position 3. The Verge – A major international tech publication that deals with US product variants and pricing (which is very different compared with the Australia)



Position 4. Local laptop manufacturer and online store that recently started copying my brand



Position 5. Marketing blog from Dell



The rest of the list is much the same, but what's really telling is when we look at my unique content and how Google treats that...

### Google Search Central – Structured Data Test

Google makes a big point about using [Schema metadata](#) when posting articles so that Google Search knows what it's looking at better. However, the Australian SERPs are ignored for international content that's out of date, describing older products, uses different currencies which have very different availability and value propositions compared to Australia.

Here is an annotated example:

About 7,900,000 results (0.38 seconds)

PCMag <https://www.pcmag.com/reviews/laptops>

### Asus Zenbook 14 OLED (UM3402) Review

7 Aug 2023 — The Asus Zenbook 14 OLED (UM3402) stands out, thanks to a mix of premium design, excellent connectivity, and a gorgeous high-res display. If you...

Rating: 4.5 Review by Brian Westwood (10/21/2023 to 10/21/2023)

AI-AMD Configurations Sleek, Durable Design Healthy Handful of Ports

US based, one year old version

#### Videos

2024 Asus Zenbook 14 OLED REVIEW - READY FOR PRIME ...

YouTube Andrew Marc David 1 month ago

US based

18 key moments in this video

Ultra Thin, AMAZING Price - ASUS ZenBook 14X OLED Review

YouTube Hardware Canucks 29 Sept 2023

Wrong product. North American based

14 key moments in this video

Zenbook Pro 14 OLED (UX6404) REVIEW: The Best Laptop ...

YouTube Andrew Marc David 29 Aug 2023

One-year old US version by same guy in first Youtube link

17 key moments in this video

View all

PCMag Australia <https://au.pcmag.com/reviews/laptops>

### Asus Zenbook 14 OLED (UM3402) - Review 2023

3 Aug 2023 — The Asus Zenbook 14 OLED (UM3402) stands out, thanks to a mix of premium design, excellent connectivity, and a gorgeous high-res display. If you...

Price and cons: Beautiful 14-inch OLED touch screen - AMD model lags behind Intel-powered competitors - View full list

Rating: 4.5 Review by Brian Westwood (10/21/2023 to 10/21/2023)

Australian cut'n'paste US review of one year old version

pcworld.com <https://www.pcworld.com/laptops/reviews>

### Asus Zenbook 14 OLED review: Great battery life at a low price

8 Dec 2023 — Our Verdict The AMD powered Asus Zenbook 14 OLED packs an OLED touchscreen and great battery life at a surprisingly affordable price

Price and cons: Solid build quality - Excellent, high-resolution OLED touchscreen - Boiling design

Rating: 4.5 Review by Matthew S. Smith

US based

WIRED <https://www.wired.com/review/asus-zenbook-14-oled>

### Review: Asus Zenbook 14 (AMD Ryzen 5, 2023)

30 June 2023 — The OLED screen gets unbelievably bright, and battery life is still outstanding.

Price and cons: Outstanding battery life - Incredible OLED screen - Good performance

View full list USD 699.00 In stock

US based, one year old version

#### People also ask

Is ZenBook 14 worth buying?

How long does the Asus Zenbook 14 last?

What is the battery life of Asus Zenbook 14 OLED 2024?

Is Asus Zenbook 14 OLED touch screen?

Digital Trends <https://www.digitaltrends.com/computing/reviews>

### Asus Zenbook 14 OLED review: OLED on the cheap

14 June 2023 — The Asus Zenbook 14 OLED somehow manages to pack solid performance, excellent battery life, and an OLED display into a near-budget price.

Price and cons: Excellent value - Competent productivity performance - Creative performance lacking - View full list

Rating: 9/10 - Review by Mark Coppock

US based, one year old version

Trusted Reviews <https://www.trustedreviews.com/reviews>

### Asus Zenbook 14 OLED Review

14 Dec 2023 — It's a 14-inch OLED panel with a 2880 x 1800 resolution and a 120Hz refresh, and it's beautifully crisp and vibrant. Colours have a zing you ...

Rating: 4.5 - Review by Stuart Andrews

Introduction - Design and Keyboard - Display and Sound - Performance

UK based spec and pricing

ASUS <https://www.asus.com/laptops/zenbook/review>

### Zenbook 14 OLED (UX3402) - Review | Laptops For Home

The ASUS Zenbook 14 OLED UX3402ZA is a great laptop for productivity and media consumption. It performs well, has new design looks good, the battery life is...

Price and cons: High performance, especially the graphics - Not significantly faster than the predecessors - View full list

Rating: 4 - Review by Mattias Inghe

Vendor's own US-based advertorial review on their own website(!)

pcworld.com <https://www.pcworld.com/laptops/reviews>

### Asus Zenbook 14 OLED review: Meteor Lake meets OLED

27 Dec 2023 — The Asus Zenbook 14 OLED features a solid, quality build. It's almost entirely made of matte aluminum - except for the glass screen surface and...

Price and cons: High performance, especially the graphics - Not significantly faster than the predecessors - View full list

Rating: 4 - Review by Mattias Inghe

US based

Laptop Mag <https://www.laptopmag.com/articles/2024-1-laptops>

### Asus Zenbook 14 (Q4092A) OLED review — killer battery ...

22 Jan 2023 — Weighing just 2.9 pounds and sporting a thickness of only 0.67 inches, the sub-\$800 notebook is an ideal travel companion that won't break the...





Price and cons: Impressive battery life - Slippy chassis - Keys aren't bouncy and springy enough - View full list

Rating: 4 - Review by Kimberly Osdon

US based, one year old version

#### Related products

ZenBook ASUS

 <p>ASUS Zenbook Pro 14 OLED Laptop</p> <p>Rating: 4.5 (36)</p> <p>Laptop Style: Notebook</p> <p>Drive Capacity: 16 GB, 64 GB, 512 GB</p> <p>Screen Size: 14.5 in</p>	 <p>ASUS Zenbook 13.9 inch 3300x2200</p> <p>Rating: 4.5 (46)</p> <p>Laptop Style: Notebook</p> <p>Drive Capacity: 16 GB, 512 GB, 1TB</p> <p>Screen Size: 13.9 in</p>	 <p>ASUS Zenbook 14 Q408</p> <p>Rating: 4.5 (712)</p> <p>Laptop Style: Notebook</p> <p>Drive Capacity: 256 GB, 512 GB, 1TB</p> <p>Screen Size: 14 in</p>	 <p>ASUS Zenbook 13 UX325</p> <p>Rating: 4.5 (9)</p> <p>Laptop Style: Notebook</p> <p>Drive Capacity: 512 GB</p> <p>Screen Size: 13.3 in</p>
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#### Related searches

Asus zenbook 14 oled review australia

asus zenbook 14 oled (um3402) review

asus zenbook 14 oled review

asus zenbook 14 oled review 2024

asus zenbook 14 oled ryzen 7 7730u

asus zenbook 14 ux3402

### Asus Zenbook 14 OLED 14"

Rating: 4.7 (341)

Details Reviews Shops



Drive Capacity - Installed Memory -

jB Hi-Fi Asus ZenBook 14" 2.8...

ASUS ZenBook 14" 2.8...

Amazon AU ASUS Zenbook Lapto...

Officeworks ASUS 14" Zenbook

The Good Guys ASUS Zenbook 14"

ASUS Store AU ASUS Zenbook 14...

Compare prices Feedback

Zenbook 14 OLED (UM3402) | Laptops For H...

4/5 PCMag

4/5 LaptopMafia

9/10 Digital Trends

Zenbook 14 OLED Laptop is built for effortless portability. The laptops expansive 16.10 OLED HDR NanoEdge touch screen delivers pixel perfect vi...

Battery Life 19 hours

Weight 1.39 kg

AC Adapter Output 65 W

Accessories Included Power Adapter

More details Feedback

#### User reviews

4.7

346 reviews

Search reviews How good is it?

What do you like best about it? Any problems?

Would you recommend it?

Anonymous 9 months ago

Good laptop for this price, with a couple caveats

PROS: Beautiful design, looks sleek and modern, made of aluminum, which is sturdy, you can open the laptop with just one hand without the base feeling too flimsy, it's also very slim which makes it extremely portable

Height OLED display makes this model a very good choice for media - More

Reviewed on tenfoot.ca

More reviews

#### Critic reviews

PCMag 4/5

A slick design and a fantastic OLED display—all for less than a grand... More

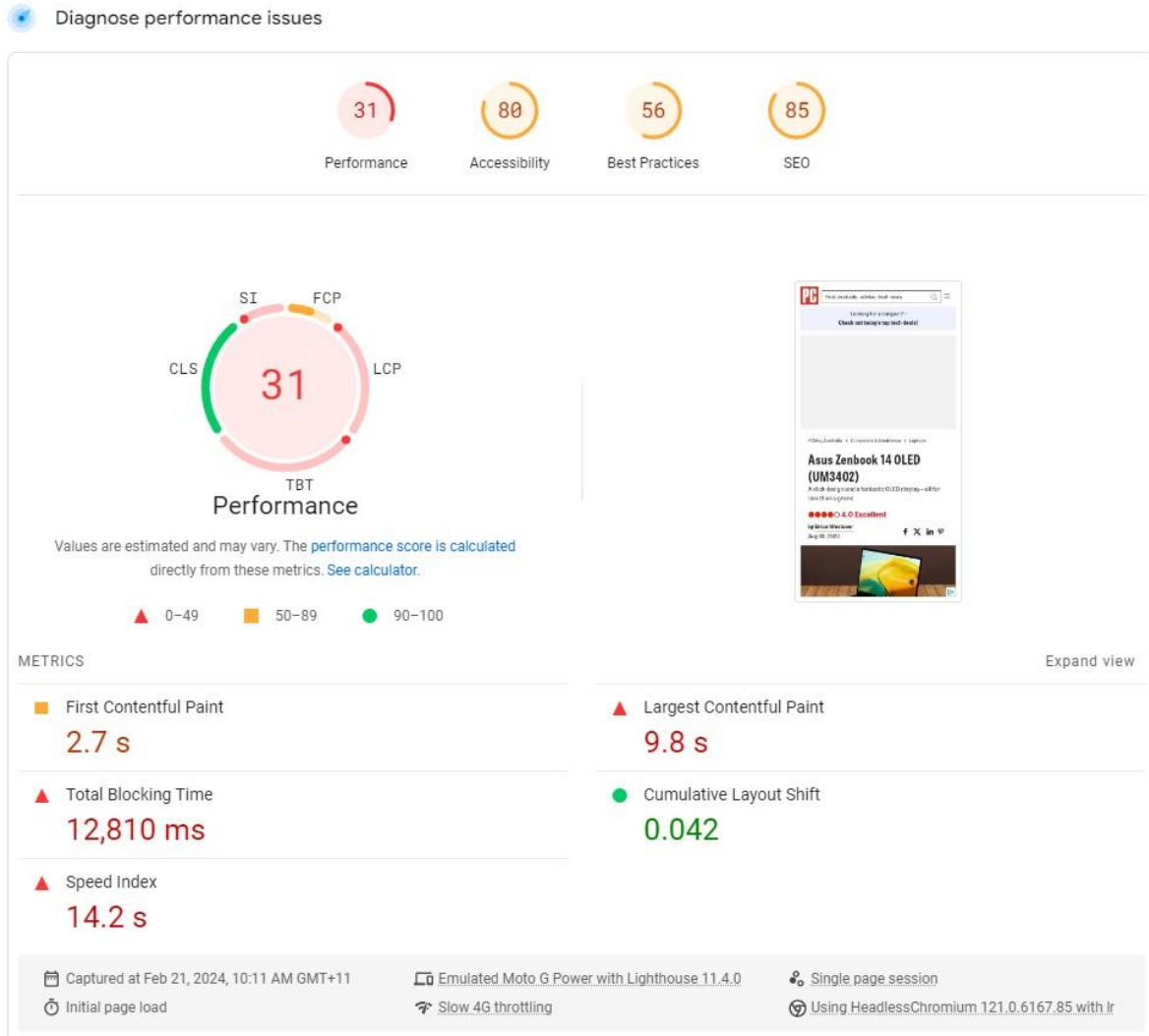
LaptopMafia 4/5

ASUS Zenbook 14 (UM3402) re...

Feedback

Identical articles by the same person

I won't go into the Page Speed Insights scores of all the above results, but here's what appeared at Position 1:



Here's a quick description of the results:

Position 1: PCMag - Out of date, overseas content, wrong currency

Video 1: US based YouTube

Video 2: Canada based and wrong product on YouTube

Video 3: Out of date US version by same guy on YouTube as Position 1

Position 2: PCMag Australia - Exact same out of date review by overseas contributor in Position 1, cut and pasted onto Australian site.

Position 3: PCWorld – US version

Position 4: Wired – Out of date US version



Position 5: Digital Trends – Out of date US version

Position 6: Trusted Reviews – Different model, UK version

Position 7: Asus – product seller’s own non-editorial ‘marketing reviews’ from the US

Position 8: PCWorld US version again

Position 9: Laptop Mag – US based and out of date version

Position 10: Choice – Out of date – but Australian at least

Position 11: Asus – Product seller’s own marketing review again. US based

Position 12: Mine (since vanished) The only up-to-date valid result for Australian searchers

Position 13: The Verge: US based, 2 year old version

Position 14: RTINGS: US based and one-year old version

Position 15: Fstoppers: US based review

Position 16: Reddit – this post is low up-voted and is simply a page with a YouTube video embedded at the top (the same video as above in the videos section). It’s not listed as promoted.


Position 17: Reviews.org – Aussie site but 2year old version

Position 18: Laptop mag: Out of date, US version

Position 19: Asus Australia’s own site with list of reviews


In this instance, [my review](#) at High Performance Laptops, is one of two useful SERP results. It excels according to Google’s Page Speed Insights ratings – especially compared to competitors.

It has all the correct metadata added according to Google’s Rich Results Test:






**4 valid items detected**  
 Valid items are eligible for Google Search's rich results. [Learn more](#)

[VIEW TESTED PAGE](#)   [PREVIEW RESULTS](#)


Details




Crawl  
 Crawled successfully on Apr 17, 2024, 4:14:00PM

Detected structured data

 Product snippets	1 valid item detected	>
 Articles	1 valid item detected	>
 Breadcrumbs	1 valid item detected	>
 Review snippets	1 valid item detected	>

Google's Test at Schema.org says there are no errors:

**Schema.org**   Documentation   Schemas   About    

 <https://highperformancelaptops.com.au/reviews/asus-zenbook-14-oled-review>   NEW TEST    

```

1 <!DOCTYPE html>
2 <html class="no-js" lang="en-AU" prefix="og: https://ogp.me/#">
3 <head itemscope itemtype="http://schema.org/WebSite"><script>if(navigat
4   <meta charset="UTF-8">
5   <!-- Always force latest IE rendering engine (even in intranet) & C
6   <!--[if IE ]>
7   <meta http-equiv="X-UA-Compatible" content="IE=edge,chrome=1">
8   <![endif]-->
9   <link rel="profile" href="http://gmpg.org/xfn/11" />
10
11     <link rel="icon" href="https://highperformancelapto
12
13     <!-- IE10 Tile.-->
14     <meta name="msapplication-TileColor" content="#FFFFFF">
15     <meta name="msapplication-TileImage" content="https://highp
16
17     <!-- iOS/android/handheld specific -->
18     <link rel="apple-touch-icon-precomposed" href="https://high
19
20     <meta name="viewport" content="width=device-width,
21     <meta name="apple-mobile-web-app-capable" content="yes">
22     <meta name="apple-mobile-web-app-status-bar-style" content=
23
24
  
```

**Detected**   0 ERRORS   0 WARNINGS   5 ITEMS

hentry	0 ERRORS	0 WARNINGS	1 ITEM
NewsArticle	0 ERRORS	0 WARNINGS	1 ITEM
WebSite	0 ERRORS	0 WARNINGS	1 ITEM
Product	0 ERRORS	0 WARNINGS	1 ITEM
SiteNavigationElement	0 ERRORS	0 WARNINGS	1 ITEM

All is correct on Google Search Console and it says it is indexed (it doesn't appear at all any more)

The screenshot shows the Google Search Console interface. The URL being inspected is `https://highperformancelaptops.com.au/reviews/asus-zenbook-14-oled-review`. The 'URL Inspection' section shows a green checkmark for 'URL is on Google' with the note: 'It can appear in Google Search results (if not subject to a manual action or removal request) with all relevant enhancements. [Learn more](#)'. Below this, 'Page indexing' is also marked as successful, with the status 'Page is indexed'. The 'Enhancements & Experience' section lists four items, all with green checkmarks: 'HTTPS' (Page is served over HTTPS), 'Product snippets' (1 valid item detected), 'Breadcrumbs' (1 valid item detected), and 'Review snippets' (1 valid item detected). A 'TEST LIVE URL' button is visible in the top right of the inspection area.

### In short:

I've followed ALL of Google's advice regarding content quality and mark-up. All of Google's tools green-light my articles. But they have consistently dropped in the rankings for the past 18 months to the point where they have vanished. There is nothing to say I've done anything wrong. I have nowhere to turn. There are many publishers saying exactly the same thing.

Over 90 per cent of the results that Google is displaying overwhelmingly come from pages that do not follow its own publishing best practice guidelines. They are also from large multinationals that use Google Ads, from major Google Ad buyers, from Google's own products (like YouTube) and from sites with partnerships with Google (Reddit). None of these are flagged as Sponsored results yet they all appear in organic SERPs despite being old, irrelevant and commercial.

This is totally unacceptable for Australian publishers and journalists. The GNI host told me that people could just add Australia to their searches but Google Trends tells us that a fraction of searchers do this. Google also knows where you are to a precise degree

and so any suggestion that this should be necessary in the first place, is ridiculous. On top of that, adding Australia to searches doesn't help matters anymore.

At best, Google is ignoring Australian publishers in favour of large, international websites. At worst, it's promoting content it financially benefits from as organic Google results.

What is very much evident is that the promise of removing spammy, unhelpful and unoriginal content is not true.

As the monopoly in Search, it needs to be held to account for this.