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Forensics

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Analyst Report

Client: Thomas & Thomas Partners LLP

Prepared for: Jack Spiegler

Subject: Back linking and SAPE.RU

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Lab Reference: THO1008008

Document Reference: THO1008008-THM-2

Date: 4th April 2019

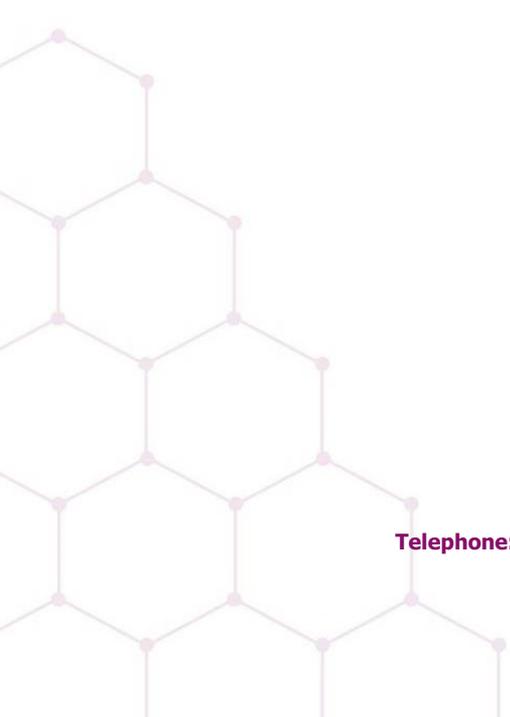
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1. Brief

1.1. Background

- [1] A claim has been made against the owners of the domain Socats.co.uk suggesting that they are using illegal methods to improve the ranking of their website domain in search engine result pages.

1.2. Request

- To explain the process of back linking,
- To discuss the effect of backlinks on search engine results,
- Show that an unrelated third party can generate backlinks.

2. Back linking

- [2] Back linking is a method used by Search Engine Optimisers (SEOs) to improve their webpages visibility to users.
- [3] Commonly a search engine will ascribe a value to a web page so that it can assess that page's importance and so position it in a search engine results page (SERP). In the case of Google this is known as the page's PageRank. A page with a high PageRank will appear higher up in a results page than one with a lower PageRank.
- [4] Search engines use many metrics to calculate such values, one of these metrics is how many pages are linking to a page. This is known as a back link.
- [5] The efficacy of backlinks is questionable. Whilst SEO's frequently recommend such techniques, (backed with empirical data), Google, for example, claims to be reducing reliance on such methods and goes to great lengths to monitor and limit abuse of the system.
- [6] The Google Search Console Help pages has the following text regarding 'Link Schemes', such as those available from the Sape.ru website:

Link schemes

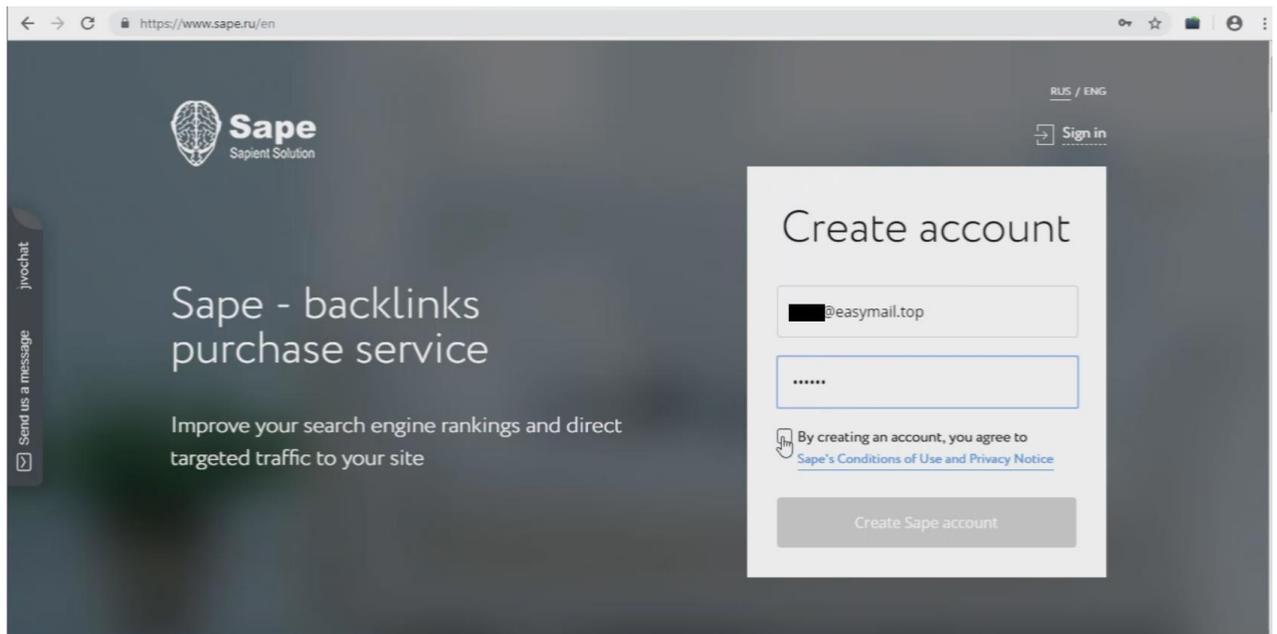
Any links intended to manipulate [PageRank](#) or a site's ranking in Google search results may be considered part of a link scheme and a violation of Google's [Webmaster Guidelines](#). This includes any behavior that manipulates links to your site or outgoing links from your site.

The following are examples of link schemes which can negatively impact a site's ranking in search results:

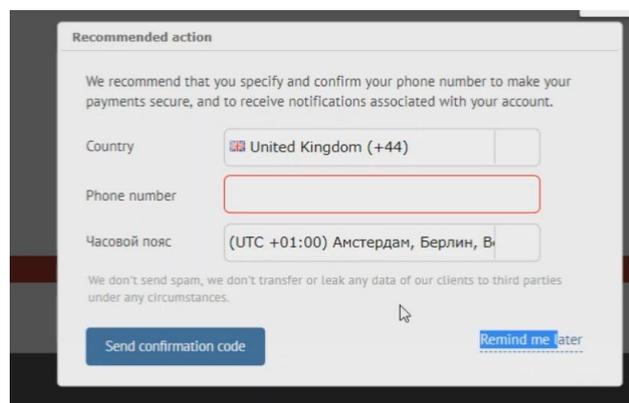
- Buying or selling links that pass [PageRank](#). This includes exchanging money for links, or posts that contain links; exchanging goods or services for links; or sending someone a "free" product in exchange for them writing about it and including a link.

3. SAPE.RU

- [7] SAPE.RU is a website that sells backlinks that it claims will increase a web page's PageRank.
- [8] An account was created on the service to demonstrate that an unrelated third party can create backlinks to a domain without the authorisation of the owner of that domain.
- [9] A 'disposable' email address was created and the account created:



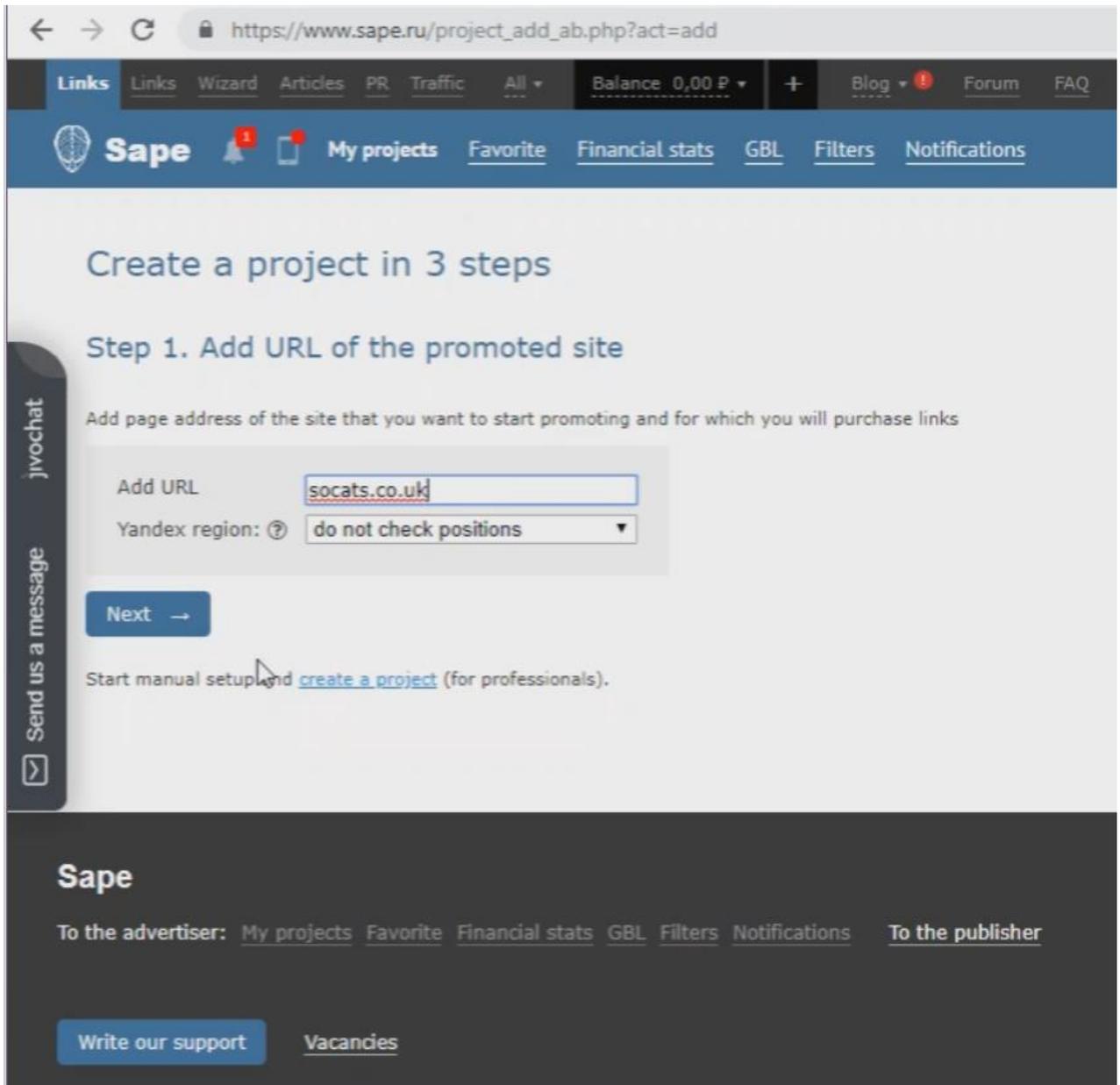
- [10] No details were required, other than email address and password, to create the account. Further no email verification email was required. For security an optional phone number is requested:



- [11] The system works using 'projects', a project requires a domain to be set as part of a three step process.

3.1. Step 1. Add URL of the promoted site

[12] AS a demonstration 'SOCATS.CO.UK' was chosen as the target domain. Backlinks are to be created in websites provided by the Sape service that point to this domain:



[13] When Next is clicked, no request is made to verify ownership of the domain.

3.2. Step 2: Add links text

[14] This page sets what keyword are to be placed with the links:

Links

Links Wizard Articles PR Traffic All Balance 0,00 P + Blog Forum FAQ

Sape My projects Favorite Financial stats GBL Filters Notifications

Create a project in 3 steps

Step 2. Add links texts

Links texts are the texts that will be placed on sites in the form of links to URL of your pages.

Add texts

make a link Text generator

```
link text one
link text two
I
```

Links texts are the texts that will be placed on sites in the form of links to URL of your pages. The maximum link length with the surrounding text should not be more than 100 symbols!

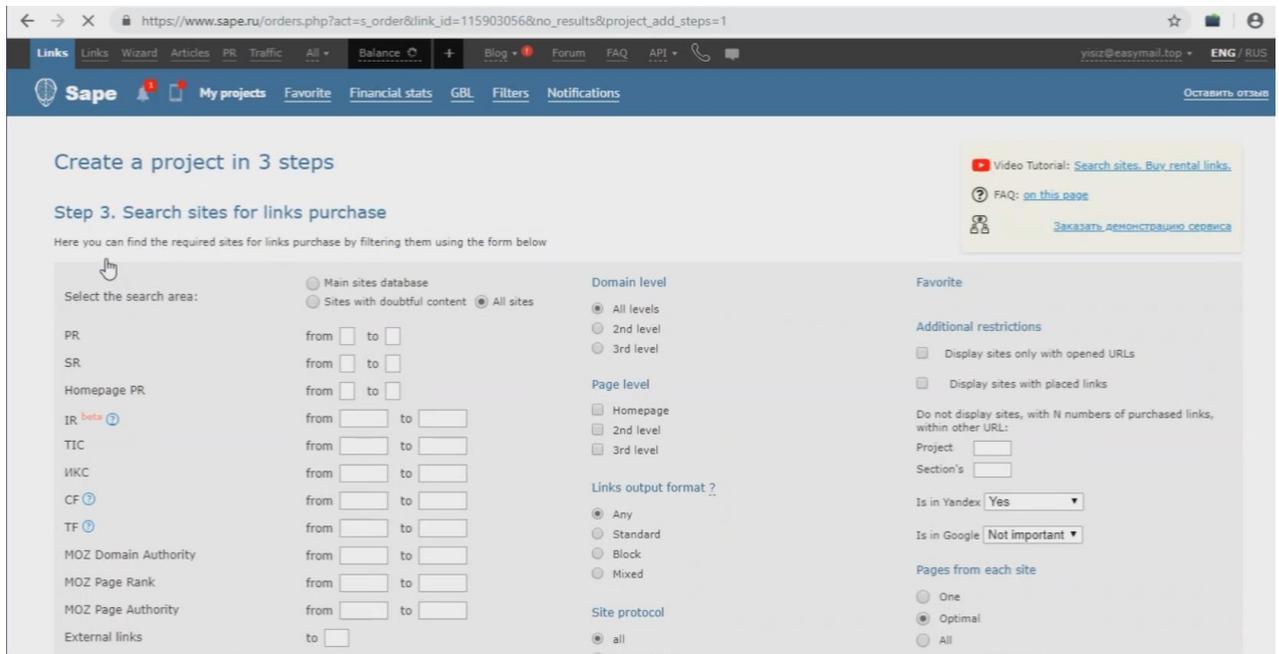
Sape can place links on sites with text out of `<a>` tag. For example, 'Sale of `roller skates` in Moscow'

In this case, you have to add anchors to the link text:
Sale of `#a# roller skates #/a#` in Moscow.
`#a# Roller skates #/a#` from stock in Moscow.
The sale of `#a# roller skates #/a#`

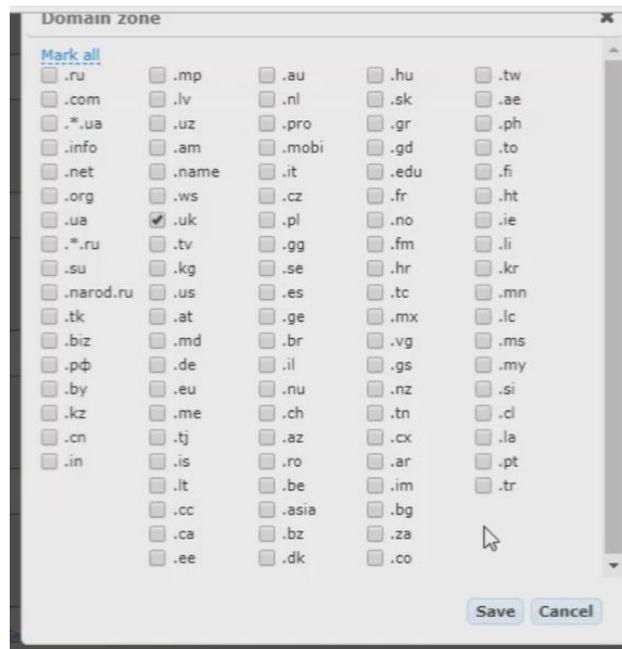
jvachat
Send us a message

3.3. Step 3. Search sites for links purchases

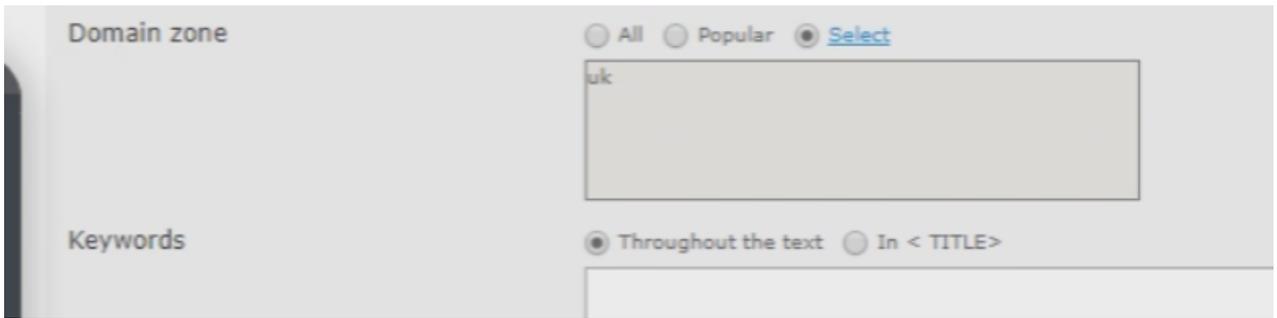
[15] This stage allows the user to search for and limit which domains are to be selected for domains. These can be based on a number of factors including PageRank, age of domain and domain zone.



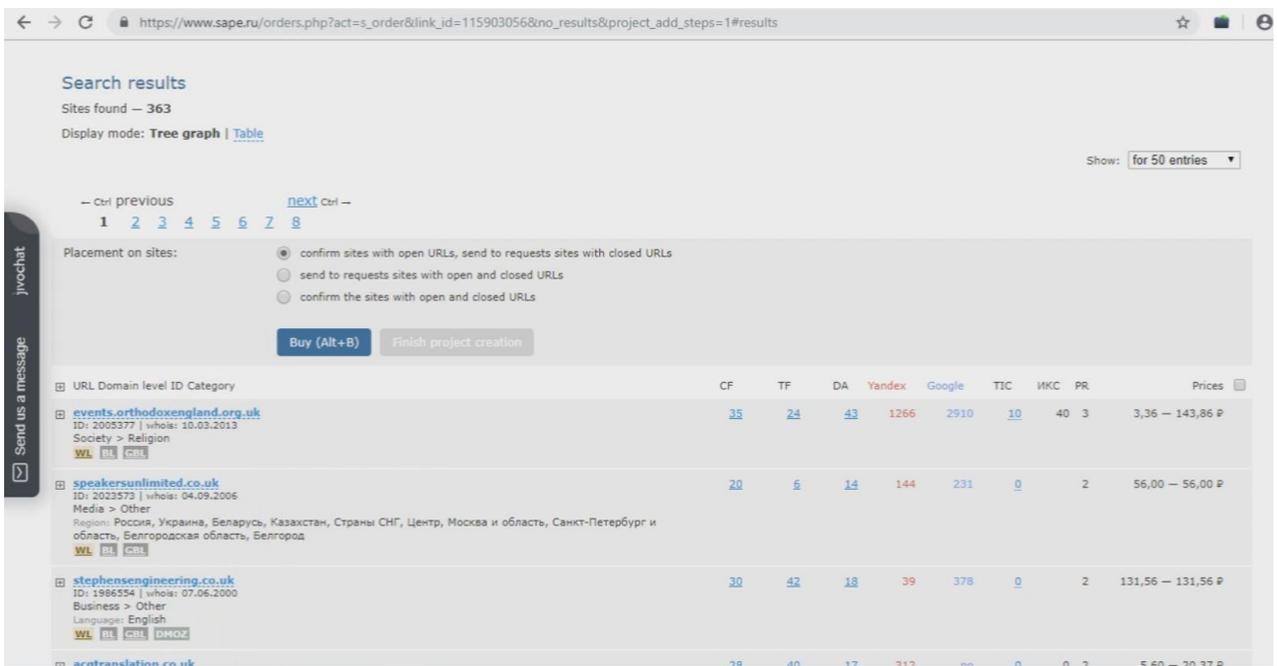
[16] In this test I chose to limit the search to pages with domain names ending with UK (e.g. thejackdaw.co.uk).



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[17] Searching with these parameters resulted in the following 363 sites being presented for selection as backlink hosts:



[18] Pages can be selected individually or en-masse.



[19] Clicking 'Buy' completes setting up the project and the following pop up is shown:

In order to satisfy payment systems requirements and within the confines of legalization of proceeds from crime regulations please enter the following data:

Surname

Name

Patronymic (if applicable)

[20] Again this information is not verified.

[21] Back links must be paid for in advance (unless an invoicing account is agreed), the following pop up asks the user to deposit money.

Refill account

Invoice payment WebMoney VISA MasterCard VISA QIWI WALLET Яндекс Yandex.Money

Make a deposit ₺

Commission **0%** 0.00 ₺

The debited amount 0 ₺

Recommended deposit amounts

300 ₺	600 ₺	1,200 ₺
For a week	For two weeks	For a month

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[22] Returning to the main page shows the project has been set up and is ready for use:

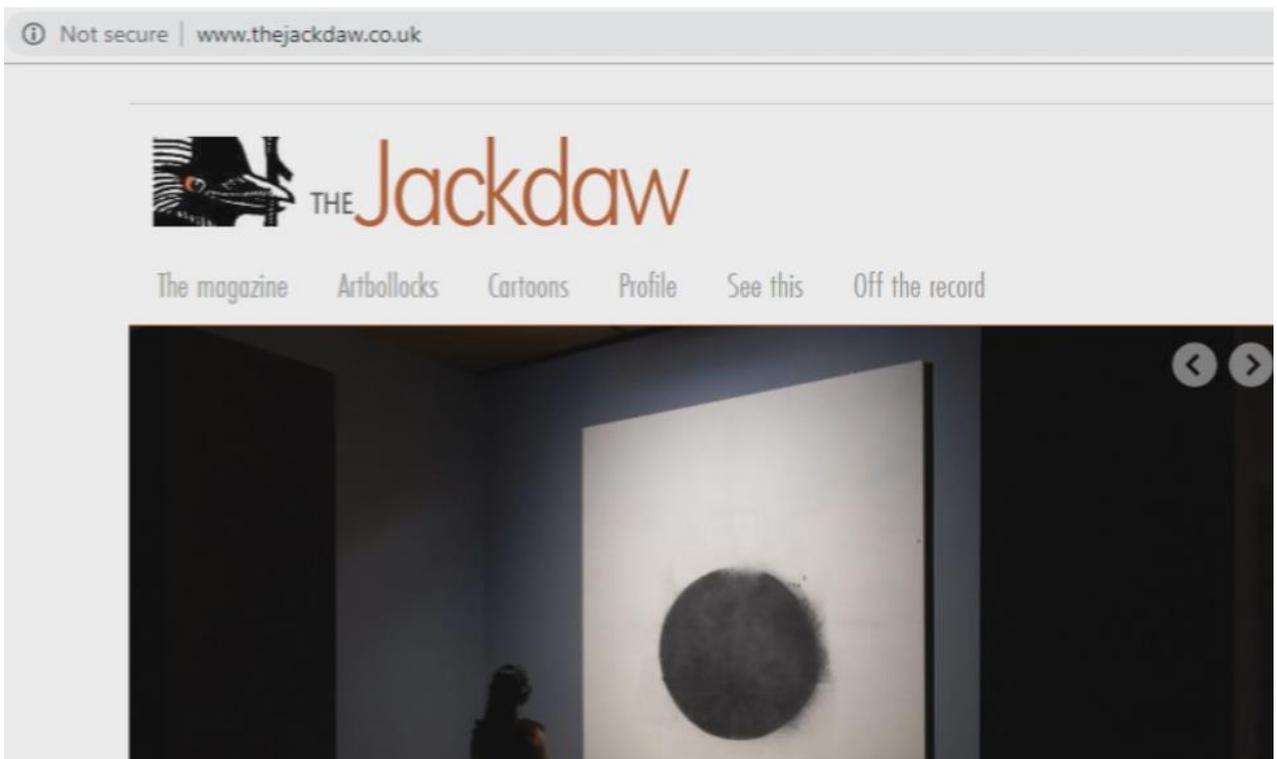
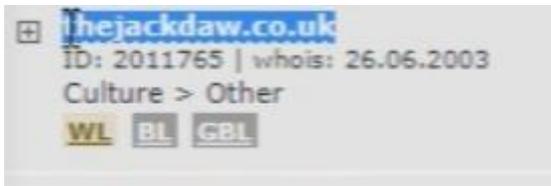
The screenshot shows the 'My projects' page on the Sape website. The page is titled 'My projects' and includes a 'Create new project' button. Below the title, there are statistics: 'Total statistics / Only for this section', 'No new requests', and 'Links prices haven't changed'. A 'Budget forecast for a day / a month: 0,00 / 0,00' is also displayed. The page is organized into sections, with 'Main 1' selected. A table shows the project 'socats.co.uk' with a budget of 0,00 and 2 links. The table has columns for 'Spent' (Today, yesterday, Total), 'Monthly budget', 'Links', and 'Requests'. Below the table, there is a list of links with columns for 'URL', 'Mode', 'Today', 'Yesterday', 'Total', 'Budget per month', 'Links', 'Requests', 'Texts', and 'Teasers'. The link 'socats.co.uk' is listed with a mode of 'P' and 2 links. The page also features a sidebar with 'jivochat' and a 'Send us a message' button. The top navigation bar includes links for 'Links', 'Wizard', 'Articles', 'PR', 'Traffic', 'All', 'Balance', 'Blog', 'Forum', 'FAQ', 'API', and 'ENG / RUS'.

[23] At no point in the process, up to payment, is user identity verified. At no point is ownership of the domain verified.

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3.4. Inserted Links

[24] The following domain was chosen for further testing. I viewed this domain outside Sape.



[25] The source code for this page was inspected and the following code was identified. This is the same code identified by the complainant in other websites.

```
<style> div#bdd1b7801d9329b2f9d7313381627c70c1 { text-align:center; font-style: normal; text-decoration: none; font-weight: normal; font-size: 0px; color: gray; }
</style>
<style> div#bdd1b7801d9329b2f9d7313381627c70c2 { text-align:center; font-style: normal; text-decoration: none; font-weight: normal; font-size: 0px; color: gray; }
</style><div id="bdd1b7801d9329b2f9d7313381627c70c1"><div id="bdd1b7801d9329b2f9d7313381627c70c2"><script type="text/javascript">
<!--
var _acic=[dataProvider:10];(function(){var e=document.createElement("script");e.type="text/javascript";e.async=true;e.src="//www.acint.net/acic.js";var
t=document.getElementsByTagName("script")[0];t.parentNode.insertBefore(e,t)}})()
//-->
</script> <a href="https://www.mobile-signal-boosters.co.uk/" target="_blank">Mobile Phone Signal Booster for United Kingdom</a> . <a href="https://topportalreview.com/best-shoes-
protector-spray-for-white-shoe/" target="_blank">best waterproof spray shoes</a> . <a href="https://toptenproductreview.com/best-led-christmas-lights/" target="_blank">LED
Lights</a> . <a href="https://sproductreviews.com/best-bike-chain-lubes/" target="_blank">bike-chain</a> </div></div><script>(function($){$(document).ready(function(){})(jQuery);
</script><script type="text/javascript" src="http://www.thejackdaw.co.uk/wp-content/themes/magazinum/js/scarousel.js?ver=4.7.13"></script>
```

[26] Further domains were selected and were found to show the same code.

4. Company Profile

CCL is the UK's largest digital forensics laboratory and a leading provider of Digital Forensics, e-Disclosure, and IT consultancy services. From our beginnings as an independent IT consultancy in 1986, we have completed 2,000+ engagements and grown through market demand to:

- develop and further our digital forensic services
- embrace the advances in new technology with internal R&D
- handle large volumes of multi-channel digital evidence
- provide a training academy to develop IT forensic and cyber awareness skills

From our head office in Stratford-upon-Avon we provide digital forensics services to a broad range of organisations, from law enforcement agencies and civil and criminal law firms, to corporate and private clients; we have completed more than 80,000 cases since 2001. We offer detailed forensic support using standard commercial forensic tools but excel in situations that require more complex forensic capabilities and our broad experience. Together with our strong R&D capability we are able to easily extract and analyse data from the most obscure and unsupported technology and apps.

CCL's e-disclosure and data collection services are underpinned by over a decade of experience in digital forensics. A forensic approach to e-disclosure ensures that crucial data is not overlooked and that evidence is defensible in court. It also ensures that metadata is preserved, which can prove critical to subsequent processing, indexing, and the timeline production of data during review.

Our services are methodology and governance driven to comply with our quality and compliance standards: ISO17025, ISO27001, and ISO9001.

END OF REPORT