Russians Deploy ’Google Bombs’

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When the Russian Ministry of Health failed to procure HIV meds for its citizens, Alexandra Volgina “Google bombed” the ministry. As NPR reported, Volgina, an HIV-positive mother and a member of Patients in Control, launched the digital offensive in which advocates went online and linked the phrase “Ministry of Health” with photos showing empty stocks of meds; that way, when anyone Googled the phrase “Ministry of Health,” those images came up. (Famous U.S. Google bombs include Dan Savage linking “Santorum”—as in the antigay presidential hopeful—to a certain aspect of anal sex.) Volgina’s tactic got the ministry’s attention and improved the drug supply. Such innovative actions also helped earn Patients in Control a Red Ribbon Award for advocacy and human rights at July’s XIX International AIDS Conference (AIDS 2012), where she gave a talk, “How to Use Social Media When Censorship Gets in Your Way: Experiences From Russia’s ‘Funeral Bureau.’” Bombs away!

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