

An ethical alternative to "doorway pages"

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An ethical alternative to "doorway pages"

By Scott Smigler

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Definition: A doorway page is content created specifically for the purpose of garnering high placements in the search engines.

Issue: Google makes the following specific recommendation: Avoid "doorway" pages created just for search engines or other "cookie cutter" approaches such as affiliate programs with little or no original content (<http://www.google.com/intl/az/webmasters/guidelines.html>).

This article addresses the issue of doorway pages, proposes an acceptable alternative and offers some insights into the basic principles of search engine optimization.

To frame the issue of doorway pages it is important to understand why content is so critical to search engine optimization. In order to do this we need to step back and take a look at the search engines themselves:

·Google, Yahoo, MSN, and all other search engines want to provide the same thing: A prioritized list of links that point to most relevant web sites satisfying the users search criteria.

·Relevance is defined as the "best content" with the "best fit" to the user's search. That's a search engine's value - providing efficient access to the information a user wants when they want it.

·The search engine that does the best job of delivering the largest quantity of the most relevant results attracts the most users.

·Obviously speed, ease-of-use and "marketing" impact popularity but in the end the quality of the results counts most.

The best way for you to get long-term results is by "partnering" with the search engines. Partnering means recognizing and supporting the value-proposition that the search engines provide to their end-users:

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- Provide lots of highly relevant content
- Follow accepted (i.e. ethical) search engine optimization principles

Is there an alternative? Sure, like many situations there are always short cuts and quick fixes that purport to let you "game the system." Instead of partnering with the search providers you compete with them. By "compete" I mean all the effort (and dollars) expended to chase their constantly evolving algorithms and artificially increase your site's rankings. These techniques may get you short-term results but many are considered the equivalent of "spamming" and could get your site de-listed. From a search engine providers point of view, anything that gets better results for sites with inferior content (and fit) is compromising their product and is temporary until they tune their algorithm so that it correctly ranks your site (down).

One of these shortcuts is the use of "doorway pages." The rest of this article discusses the use of doorway pages and recommends an alternative approach.

What is a doorway page?

Doorway pages are pages of content that have been specifically designed to achieve high rankings in the search engines. They are often used by websites that don't have an abundance of content within the main pages of their site due to technology issues or design conflicts. They can be an effective tool for garnering short-term placement in search engine rankings when used appropriately, but doorway pages have been abused by websites for many years, to the point that they are frowned upon by search engines who now attempt to exclude them from their result pages.

What does a "Doorway Page" look like?

A doorway page appears as if it was built specifically to attain high search engine placement, and offers little value to searchers. It often has the following characteristics:

- oA lot of poorly written content, with an abundance of hyperlinked phrases in the body text
- oCopy that is stuffed with lists of keywords
- oZero (0) in-bound links from other parts of the website

Example: you build a doorway page named "targeted-keyword.html," but do not link to this page from any other part of your website. Google assumes no in-bound links exist because this page is of little value, and you want to hide it from regular visitors to its site.

- oA "redirection" that automatically loads a new page once the doorway pages is accessed

Bottom line: A doorway page stands alone from your website, and offers little value to searchers

If any of those characteristics exist on the page, and if a number of these pages are created within a single website, Google is likely to discount their value, or worse, ban the site.

If doorway pages are inappropriate then what is a better alternative?

The "essay page"

An essay page, on the other hand, is integrated into the main website (although not into the navigation structure). It offers real value to the searcher because the content is relevant and well-written. It often has the following characteristics:

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- oClean HTML coding with an HTML design similar to that of other pages of the website
 - oA lot of content, with several hyperlinked phrases in the body text
 - oSeveral in-bound links from other parts of the website
- Example: On the solutions page, you hyperlink the phrase "targeted keyword," to the targeted-keyword.html essay page.
- oQuality content that offers real value to the searcher

Bottom line: An essay page is a natural extension of your website. For all intents and purposes, it is integrated content more than it is a doorway page, because it expands on a certain subject.

Will you benefit from using essay pages?

Essay pages used effectively can be good solutions when a site's navigation does not support the addition of content, or if it would be difficult to develop valuable content to include within the main navigation. If this is not the case I recommend that you add additional pages of content (which will provide more benefits than essay pages), while enhancing the user experience.

Summary and Recommendation

The creation and proper integration of additional content is critical to the ability to achieve consistent top 10 rankings on the most targeted keywords. Essay pages can be valuable when a website cannot be easily scaled to include more content through the main navigation structure. However, the first priority should be increasing content as much as possible before resorting to essay pages.

Over time, your more sophisticated competitors will compete for placement by incorporating significant content, and by implementing important search engine optimization features, not by using essay (or doorway) pages.

If you've adopted an aggressive "doorway page" strategy, it's possible (and maybe likely) that a competitor would report it to Google. If Google determines that you have violated their "rules," you could be "de-listed".

As a result of the risk that doorway pages pose and the benefits integrating additional relevant content provides, I strongly recommend the approach of reevaluating your navigation structure, and adding additional pages of relevant content if possible. From a search engine ranking point of view - content is not king, but relevant content sure is.

Scott Smigler has been an evangelist for a serious, ROI-based focus on the online channel since he founded Exclusive Concepts in 1997. Exclusive Concepts provides integrated online marketing strategies, Internet brand consulting, search engine marketing campaigns and results-oriented web sites for hundreds of clients that range in size from small ecommerce firms to public companies.

SEARCH ENGINES GIVE YOU FREE ADVERTISING!

By Richard Igoe

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Getting a good ranking in the major search engines is probably **THE BEST** way to get traffic to your site, but just how to do this is the question. There are literally millions of web sites out there.

But remember a good website ranking is virtually **FREE** advertising and will bring in a steady flow of traffic, so it is worth going to some lengths to get a good position.

First, sit back for a minute and ask yourself what exactly you are selling. What keywords are people going to search for to find your page? Getting a good ranking on a search engine depends on the keywords you are using – or more specifically the keywords people are using to find you!

Your aim should be to create a few **HIGHLY FOCUSED** doorway pages for your site, each one optimized for a particular keyword or phrase. But be honest with yourself. Use keywords or phrases that describe your product or service as closely as possible.

To help you find out which keywords are most searched for, and how likely you are of getting a good ranking, there is a very good tool called WordTracker. It emails you a free weekly report of the top 500 keywords (phrases) that are requested on the major search engines. It also filters out all pornographic words which account for 25% of search engine requests. However it also does more!

You can enter a keyword or phrase that you want people to find your webpage with, and it will return a list of 100 other related keywords. You then click on any of those keywords and you will get a list of how many searches have been made for it in the last 24 hours. Then Wordtracker compares the results with the number of pages ranked on AltaVista for each keyword or phrase and compiles a report for you.

Now here is why this tool is so valuable. You can see which keywords you have more chance with in obtaining a higher search engine ranking – those keywords with a lot of

hits but relatively fewer pages listed on AltaVista – and

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create doorway pages optimized for those keywords. The doorway pages you create will now have a better chance of ranking in the top 20 or 30. Wordtracker has a free trial.

Now after choosing your keywords, create a doorway page for each one.

Most search engines place a high importance on the keywords and description "META" tags on your web pages. For a more detailed explanation of META tags, look at our HTML tutorial at <http://www.TheWebsEye.com/HTML.htm>.

As well as the meta tags, search engines take into account a number of other considerations such as keywords in the TITLE tag, in your header tags, and how keywords are placed on your pages. If you want to know more about how search engines rank your pages we strongly recommend you download the award winning free e-book "Search Engine Tactics" from our downloads page – <http://www.TheWebsEye.com/downloads.htm> (only 129 KB).

The more specific your keyword or phrase, the easier it is to get a high ranking. A page optimized for "Chinese herbal tea" should get a good ranking much more easily than a page optimized for "tea", because there would be a lot fewer sites trying to have well-positioned pages.

What we are saying therefore is that you need to use keywords that directly describe your product or service. If you are paying someone to do it for you, make sure you tell them the exact search phrases you want your site to be found with.

Designing a number of "doorway" pages, each page optimized for a different keyword or phrase, will multiply your traffic. ALSO remember that search engines don't all use the same set of rules (algorithms) to rank your pages. Some might place more emphasis on the META tags while others may spider the content.

You can take your page optimization one step further now, and create a doorway page not only for each keyword, but for each of the major search engines. So it is quite easy to have 30 doorway pages for one product or service – 3 different keywords and 10 search engines. To do this properly involves searching for your keyword on a

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particular search engine and then analyzing what the top 5 or 10 sites have in common. You can then optimize your own

page based on the results of your search. Doing this manually is not time-efficient when you can get software to do it for you.

There are a few good software packages that will spider your web pages, compare them with the top "X" results for a particular search, and then let you know what you should change. They can also monitor, keep track of your positions in the different search engines, and schedule your submissions. Optimizing your pages is still time consuming but if you are prepared to spend an hour a day creating a new doorway page, you will soon be able to create your own "traffic puller" on the web.

You will find details of how to get WordTracker and free trials of Webpage optimizing software at our website – <http://www.TheWebsEYE.com/search-engines.htm>.

Richard Igoe, – <http://www.TheWebsEYE.com> – FOCUSSING on the ESSENTIALS of website design, promotion and internet marketing.

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