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Building Doorway Domains for Optimized Search Engine Positioning

By Ralph Tegtmeier

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Doorway pages have been around for a long time and most people trying for search engine optimization are more or less familiar with them. To recapitulate: a classical doorway page is focused on a certain keyword or search phrase, carrying highly optimized text, pertinent meta tags, title, etc. It is submitted to the search engines to achieve better rankings. When human visitors hit the page, they are required to click a link to get to the site proper.

More often than not, doorway pages are quite ugly. That's because they are so highly optimized with the search engines in mind, who happen to dislike graphics, nested tables, Flash, Java applets, JavaScript, frames, and the like. So while they may perform nicely in the search engines' indices, many of them don't exactly spell out cutting edge marketing skills from the human visitors' (= clients'!) point of view. Granted that quite a few webmasters have caught on, resorting to generating more appealing pages featuring navigation elements and blending better with their sites' overall layout and design, but creating these can be a very time consuming effort.

What's more, some search engines are regularly conducting witch hunts to weed out discernible doorway pages, one of the most notable examples being AltaVista. The reason for this is the ongoing abuse the doorway page technology has been subject to over the years. With

fairly cheap programs around generating hundreds of doorways at one go, you can hardly blame the engines for implementing some self-protective countermeasures.

Another major issue concerns the restrictions imposed on volume of page submissions. Search engines tend to limit the number of pages a domain may submit per day. While such limits are seldom publicized and may vary widely from one engine to another, a general guideline adhered to by most search engine optimization professionals is about 5 pages per day and domain.

For large web sites generating hundreds or thousands of new pages (dynamic or static) per year, it is therefore paramount to work around this limitation in order to get as many pages indexed as possible. The more web pages represent a web site in a search engine index, the greater the chances of generating pre-qualified traffic.

Even if you're only selling a handful of products, any web marketing expert will tell you that you are well advised to feature each of them on a highly focused mini-site because this will considerably increase your search engine exposure and, hence, your chances of driving visitors your way. The obvious drawback of this strategy lies in the fact that while you may make a lot of one-item sales this way, getting customers to buy several products at one pop isn't quite that easy without diluting your site's thematic focus again.

This is where Doorway Domains come in. They differ from tread-of-the-mill doorway pages in that they constitute dedicated web sites in their own right – highly focused, very targeted and immensely positionable. On the other hand, they are not identical with mini-sites because human visitors will never get to see them!

Instead, they are search engine spider fodder at its very best – optimized to the last byte, they can achieve excellent rankings. They will usually consist of several pages, each of which is optimized in a different manner: meta tags, titles, keyword density, etc. With every page following a slightly different basic optimization method or algorithm, they can target all important search engines and their various references in an incredibly effective

buckshot strategy.

Search engines don't rank isolated pages very well, if at all, so the various pages of a well constructed Doorway Domain will all be interlinked with one another. Neither should they be mere clones: duplicate content on any given web site will usually be penalized.

But if, as I claimed above, human visitors don't ever get to see them, how are they supposed to boost your sales? The answer to this is redirection: surfers hitting your Doorway Domain's well positioned link on an engine's search results list will simply be forwarded to the corresponding page on your main site.

"Hey," you may groan now, "hold it! Haven't I read

all over the place that search engines take a very dim view of redirects and may actually ban sites from their indices if detected? So what are you trying to propose here – kamikaze optimization?"

You read right: search engines do indeed penalize web sites for redirection! However, there's a fairly easy, well established way out of this, and it goes under various names ranging from "Cloaking" through "IP Delivery" to "Stealth Technology", and others more.

Note that I said it is human visitors who will be redirected, not the search engine spiders. The latter will be served with their optimized "fodder" pages from the Doorway Domain itself and will never know the difference.

There are various technical methods to achieve this. You can employ specialized software which will determine automatically whether a site hit is generated by a search engine spider or a human visitor. If you have administrator rights on your system (most people haven't, but if you're running your own dedicated server this is normally a given), you can tweak your configuration to achieve the same effect, etc.

So you may think of a Doorway Domain as a "cloaked mini-site" fronting for your home page without annoying

visitors with that 'ol "Click here to enter" spiel. Remember that many studies indicate that you have only about 8–15 seconds to capture your visitors' attention if you want them to actually stay on your site. If in doubt, check your server's traffic logs! You shouldn't make life more difficult for your visitors than absolutely necessary – it's uncourteous, and it doesn't particularly motivate buyers either!

The technical fineries of cloaking are, unfortunately, beyond the scope of this introductory article, but there's a lot of fine material around which will help you get started if you're interested.

A detailed tutorial on the DOs and DONTs of cloaking can be found on our site at:

There's also a guided tour on cloaking available here (JavaScript enabled browser required):

Note that cloaking is not without its risks! The tutorial mentioned above will explain this in more detail.)

While these risks are widely overrated, they do indeed exist, so you should know exactly what you're doing before you actually go for it. However, once you have become familiar with the technology and seen its fantastic ranking results, you'll hardly settle for less again!

Ralph Tegtmeier is the co-founder and principal of fantomaster.com Ltd. (UK) and fantomaster.com GmbH (Belgium), a company specializing in webmasters software development, industrial-strength cloaking and search engine positioning services. You can contact him at <mailto:fneditor@fantomaster.com>

Top 5 Search Engine Optimization Mistakes

By Robin Eldred

There are a lot of ways to promote your website and, unfortunately, a lot of these methods are mistakes. Here is a list of some of the more common mistakes (often referred to as Black Hat SEO) that you should steer well clear of.

1. Bad Neighbourhoods

These sites are also known as free for all (FFA) pages and link farms. They serve no other purpose other than to list tens of thousands of unrelated websites. Not only will these sites not provide your site with any traffic, certain search engines will ban sites who participate.

2. Over Optimization

Optimizing your web pages for a particular search engine can be a good thing. Over-optimizing can defeat the purpose, however. Search engines are catching on quickly to pages that appear 'over-optimized'. Stuffing keyphrases into your pages is the most common problem. Never use hidden (invisible) text to add keywords. You will get caught, and your site will get banned.

3. Doorway Pages

Doorway pages are orphaned web pages that are typically optimized for a particular keyphrase and a particular search engine. They are promoted to the search engine in an effort to achieve high rankings. They are not linked back to by any other page on the website and, as such, search engines are able to flush them out quite easily and penalize the entire site.

4. Traffic Generation Scams

Services that purport to drive lots and lots of traffic to your website are typically not very useful. The traffic tends to come from seedy places like domain names that have lapsed in payment or commonly misspelled domain entries. Most of the traffic that hits these pages is accidental and is therefore of no value to you. Other traffic may come from other participants in the program who are required to visit other websites to gain 'credits' for their own site. Again, this traffic is not targeted and therefore of no value. Some traffic may even be generated by automated software!

5. Shadow Domains

Shadow domains are small, optimized, supplementary websites designed to drive traffic to a different website. The way this works is that an SEO company will design and optimize a website on your behalf. The danger here is that the you do not own this new website; the SEO company does! This means that if the relationship sours, they may choose to redirect this site's traffic to whomever they choose (see #4 above), or even sell the site to one of your competitors! Be very, very careful of this technique, as some supposed search engine 'experts' even use this method (no naming of names

here, however).

One final note: Any company that tells you that it can achieve 'guaranteed' rankings is either lying to you or using some of these Black Hat techniques. Unfortunately, there is no way to guarantee a number one result within (unpaid) search results. When choosing a search engine optimization company to work with, be sure you feel comfortable with them and trust them (e.g. money back guarantee). And if you decide to promote your website yourself, consider yourself a little better

educated against these common mistakes.

Robin Eldred is the president of Apis Design, a Calgary Web Design and Promotion company specializing in building, managing and promoting quality, results-oriented websites for small businesses (

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Top 5 Search Engine Optimization Mistakes

New rules for museum-domains

SEARCH ENGINES GIVE YOU FREE ADVERTISING!

Generating Website Traffic with Sub-domains

Managing Multiple AdSense Sites

Hitting the Search Engines

Clickbank Search Engine

Domain Alarm – Is your site working?

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