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Optimizing Dynamic Pages – Part II

By Dale Goetsch

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The Widget Queen Revisited

You have the world's finest collection of widgets. You created the world's best widget website. You have no traffic.

You checked in the search engines and find that your site does not appear at all, even though all your competitors' sites do. Perhaps the search engine robots cannot get to your pages to index them.

Search Engine Robots

Search engine robots are simple creatures. They can "read" text to add to their databases, and they can follow "normal" links—those links that are coded to look like

blue widgets

or the slight variation

That's it. Search engine robots cannot select items from lists; search engine robots cannot type text into boxes; search engine robots cannot click "submit" buttons. That means that no matter how important our dynamically-generated page of blue widgets is, if the only way to access that page is to select it from a list or click on a button, the robot will never be able to visit it. That, in turn, means that it will never appear in the search engine results.

So how do you get your dynamic information to show up in non-dynamic ways?

The Painful Solution

One of the reasons that dynamic pages exist is because of the difficulty involved in constantly updating — adding and deleting — pages from your site, based on which widgets you are offering this season. If you have a separate page for each make and model of widget, each of those pages can be spidered. They can all be reached through links that look like

blue widgets style 1
blue widgets style 2
red widgets style 1
red widgets style 2

new widgets style 1
new widgets style 2

The bad news here, of course, is that you now have to create all of those pages. This loses the benefit of drawing the widget information from a database.

A Better Solution

A better solution is to create only a "shell" of each page, and then to dynamically populate the page from our database. By creating a "real" file, you can assign a fixed URL, but still use the database to fill-in the page, using any of various server-side techniques (HTML server-side includes, Perl, Active Server Pages, Java Server Pages, PHP, etc.). A simple page like this might suffice:

Blue Widgets style 1

Save this page as "bluewidget-1.html" and you're good to go, assuming that "myscript.pl" will actually return the content you want for the body of the page. True, you will have a discrete page for each item in your inventory, but at least you only need to hard-code the bare-bones of that page.

Another Way To Go

There is yet another way to go. This method does not require creating dozens of static pages, or of having to include exotic scripts in your web pages. It also may not work for all search engines!

Some search engine robots just will not follow links that include a "querystring" as part of the URL. You have seen a querystring if you have ever looked at the URL of a page of search results in Google. For example, if you look for "blue widgets" on Google, not only do you get page after page of blue widgets, you also see that these pages have very complicated-looking addresses

<http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&lr=&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8&q=blue+widgets>

In this address, everything after the question mark ("?") is a querystring. This is used to pass additional information to the web server. While some search engines can follow a complicated address like this, many simply will not follow such a link. That means that if you use a URL like

```
www.mycompany.com/catalog.html?item=widget&color=blue&model=1
```

that the robot may not be able to follow it. This is bad.

On the other hand, an increasing number of search engine robots will follow such links. Usually, links like this are created "on the fly" by filling-out forms and clicking a "submit" button, but that doesn't have to be the case. You can grab that address, querystring and all, and put it into a "normal" link, like this

```
http://www.mycompany.com/catalog.html?item=widget&color=blue&model=1">blue widgets style 1
```

Put several of these on a page and the search engine robot can now visit your dynamic pages from links that require no button-clicking. Remember that not all robots will follow these links, so your mileage may vary.

As long as the link to the page exists in a form that does not require human intervention to get to it (pulldown menus, search results, form submits, etc) then a bot will follow it.

Widgets Out The Door

Using any of these methods will help search engine robots to find the dynamic pages on your site. This means that the important content on those pages is more likely to be included in the search engine databases, and that people will be better able to find you. That, of course, means that the Widget Queen will reign supreme, knowing that widget customers the world over will now be able to find you and buy your widgets.

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Dale Goetsch is the Technical Consultant for Search Innovation Marketing (<http://www.searchinnovation.com>), a Search Engine Promotion company serving small businesses and non-profits. He has over twelve years experience in software development. Along with programming in Perl, JavaScript, ASP and VB, he is a technical writer and editor, with an emphasis on making technical subjects accessible to non-technical readers.

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Dynamic Pages

By Clare Lawrence

Dynamic pages and the Search Engines By Clare Lawrence 10th March 2003 Clare is the CEO of Discount Domains Ltd a leading UK Domain name registration service.

Do search engines such as google penalise dynamic pages?

Dynamic pages are used to deliver content from a database to websites the advantage being that data can be updated and the contents of pages changed without the need to reload pages etc.

Google publishes guidance notes on its site at

and at

These say that dynamic pages are indexed but that the Googlebot (Googles spider) can overwhelm dynamic sites and therefore the amount of pages indexed are limited

Google recommends:– If you decide to use dynamic pages (i.e. the URL contains a ? character) be aware that not every search engine spider crawls dynamic pages as well as static pages. It helps to keep the parameters short and the number of them small.

How to get dynamic pages indexed

There are ways to get dynamic pages indexed, if the site is relatively small, then create a site map, which has static links to each of the dynamic pages. This gives the search engines a doorway to the dynamic pages.

For larger sites there are a number of ways to change the syntax of a dynamic URL so that it appears to be static. e.g

can be

re-written as

Index pages If your index page is dynamical generated then it will be particularly difficult for search engines to index your site. If possible you should avoid dynamically generated index pages

Algorithms

The search engines and Google in particular are getting better at indexing dynamic pages.

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Conclusion,

Dynamic pages are very useful to deliver content particularly if you wish to use a content management system. The Search engines do have some difficulties with dynamic content, but there are ways to improve the chances of dynamic pages being indexed.

Clare Lawrence is CEO of Discount Domains Ltd A leading UK provider of Domain name registration.

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