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Spiders 101 What are Spiders and How do they Work?

By Joelene Wickens-Orlando

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When I first came across this word "spiders", I had no clue what it was, what it did, or how it worked. (We're not talking about the hairy 8-legged creatures). I decided to conduct my own research and to talk to some webmasters to get a better grip of exactly what the purpose and function of spiders are. With this knowledge and understanding of spiders, I thought I would share what I have gathered on spiders. Let's begin the Spiders 101 tutorial.

Spiders are applications that crawl (henceforth the definition) the web, indexing and retrieving content, usually for the benefit of search engines, information resources and news organizations. As spiders travel, they become responsible for a bit of traffic that gets counted in traffic statistics and ad campaign reports. That still sounds a bit confusing after that description, doesn't it? Let's break it down a bit to simplify the process.

Most of the popular, heavy-traffic, search engines on the Internet today are spiders or crawlers that move along the web in search of web pages to index in their databases.

Feed a spider a single URL, (let's say we're trying to find discount beauty salon equipment) and the first thing it will do with that page is harvest all the links on that page and put them in a queue for a future visit.

This way the movement of the spider is self-perpetuating as it is programmed to visit these web sites, one by one in it's queue. Then, secondly, a crawler will make note of the title of the page.

Once that is done, the crawler will ask itself, "How relevant is the content of the page to its title."

Notice that the words: "discount, beauty, salon, and equipment" appear in almost every listing, in either the link text or the regular text.

The words appear over 100 times as a matter of fact, on that page.

Now the search engine thinks this page is about discount beauty salon equipment.

It is now a valuable, content-rich resource for those interested in discount beauty salon equipment.

When you break it down, and see how the spider operates in a step-by-step format, it is now easier to understand how spiders program and operate. Another thought to keep in mind is that spiders help your positioning or ranking in the search engines based on the keywords you select. That's why choosing a correct set of keyword phrases is paramount to your website achieving top ranking in the

search engines. (Notice that I didn't say in the top 10). That is because getting great positioning in the top 10 search engines is next to impossible. Let's hope that this little 101 on spiders will help you achieve the best, realistic positioning in the search engines as possible.

Joelene Orlando is a Web enthusiast and a staff writer/consultant for eMarketing Answers with a broad knowledge of topics covering Internet marketing and communication strategies for both consumer and small business owners.<http://www.emarketinganswers.com> is dedicated to providing free, comprehensive emarketing resources and online promotion tools.

The role of the robots.txt file to improve site ranking!

By Michael Kralj

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Not many web master take the time to use a robots.txt file for their website. For search engine spiders that use the robots.txt to see what directories to search through, the robots.txt file can be very helpful in keeping the spiders indexing your actual pages and not other information, such as looking through your stats!

The robots.txt file is useful in keeping your spiders from accessing parts folders and files in your hosting directory that are totally unrelated to your actual web site content. You can choose to have the spiders kept out of areas that contain programming that search engines cannot parse properly, and to keep them out of the web stats portion of your site.

Many search engines cannot view dynamically generated content properly, mainly created by programming languages, such as PHP or ASP. If you have an online store programmed in your hosting account, and it is in a separate directory, you would be wise to block out the spiders from this directory so it only finds relevant information.

The robots.txt file should be placed in the directory where your main files for your hosting are located. So you would be advised to create a blank text file, and save it as robots.txt, and then upload it to your web hosting to the same directory your index.htm file is located.

Here is examples of the use of the robots.txt file:

To block out a directory in a robots.txt file, such as a subdirectory for your online store called /store/ you would do the following:

```
Disallow: /store/
```

Another example to block out your stats directory:

```
Disallow: /stats/
```

You may also want to disallow individual files that you do not want searched by the search engines. For example you dont want search.php to be parsed by the Search Engines. To do this you type in the

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following on its own line:

Disallow: /search.php

Following the rules outlined and creating the robots.txt file, you will keep search engine spiders out of unwanted files and directories, and letting them go through the important files to see what your web site is all about!

Michael Kralj is owner of Emenki Web Solutions and Domains at Retail. Emenki Web Solutions are web site designers and programmers based in Hamilton, Ontario, providing businesses with an

informative and strategic approach to establishing an online presence on the web. Please visit Emenki Web Solutions on the web <http://www.emenki.com> Please visit Domains at Retail on the web: <http://www.domainsatretail.com>

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