

Doorway Pages by Any Other Name

By Sid Hale

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I would have thought that the subject of Doorway Pages (Entry Pages, Gateway Pages, etc.) had been exhaustively explored by now, but we tend to forget that there are new users coming on the internet daily, and there hasn't been much coverage on the topic recently.

There are many design and development tools (free or otherwise) available for the new webmaster, so almost anyone can build a website, but they face the same age-old problem of trying to find ways to get their new site noticed (and the longer it takes, the more frantic they get).

We all go through the same learning curve. We read or hear about various promotion techniques. We get advice on Search Engine Optimization, Opt-in Lists, Safe Lists, E-zine advertising, and the list goes on. There is a wealth of information on the web, but there is probably just as much, or more, misinformation. Not only can the important information change rapidly, but it is awfully easy to stumble across archived information, or a free eBook - and not realize that it is outdated.

Anyway, a reader recently asked me about the usefulness of Doorway Pages to increase their rankings in the search engines. It will soon become obvious what my short answer would have been, but I don't normally just accept someone else's opinion without an explanation. I hope you are the same way.

Doorway pages were first developed as a means to create a page that was optimized for a particular search engine in order to achieve a higher ranking. Because search engines used different algorithms for ranking web sites, it had become impossible to optimize a single page to meet the ranking criteria of all of them. You could get a page ranked high on one search engine and watch your rankings plummet on another.

The answer?

Create multiple (Doorway) pages - each optimized for a single, major search engine, and have each of them link, redirect, or forward to the actual web page you wanted to promote, and then submit that page to that particular search engine - instead of the actual web page your viewer will ultimately see. While it was a little extra work to create 6,7, or even a dozen or more Doorway pages - the general consensus was that the ranking results in the targeted search engines made it all worthwhile.

The problem with this...

As with every good technique, tip, or trick - some overzealous (and that's being kind) "marketers" (and that's being liberal) will find a way to abuse it. Just as some people will put popular search terms in their keywords Meta Tag regardless of whether those terms have any relevance to the web page being submitted, they also began spamming the search engines with Doorway pages.

Now, understand that the search engines gain their competitive edge by being able to deliver more relevant results to any set of search terms. It is their business purpose, their entire reason for existing. The better they are at doing this, the more popular their service becomes over their competition, and the more successful they will be. They will combat anyone or anything that interferes with their ability to deliver their product or service (wouldn't you?).

Doorway pages are viewed by the search engines as an attempt to manipulate them and their service. How can they possibly differentiate their service from the competition if they allow their "supplier" (web masters) to dictate what they will deliver to their "customer" (web surfers)? It didn't take long for the major search engines to learn to identify Doorway pages, and their overwhelming response has been to:

- downgrade the results attained through the use of those pages,
- refuse to list those pages, or
- ban the site from listing on their service altogether

I could have written this article just based on the regular reading I do, but then I would have just been passing on someone else's opinion. In order to respond to my reader with absolute confidence, I first researched over 3 years of articles from a myriad of sources. From those it was easy to see the trend build, and then come into disfavor. Finally, I went to the search engines themselves to read their current policies and guidelines. Some mention Doorway pages specifically, but even those that require a little interpretation are pretty easy to understand.

The major search engines disapprove of methods that present different content to their spiders than the content that is ultimately presented to the viewer. For your own edification, here are just a few of the listings I found, with snippets from their guidelines:

From Google: <http://www.google.com/webmasters/guidelines.html>

Make pages for users, not for search engines. Don't deceive your users, or present different content to search engines than you display to users.

Avoid "doorway" pages created just for search engines, or other "cookie cutter" approaches such as affiliate programs with little or no original content.

From AltaVista:

<http://addurl.altavista.com/addurl/new#rls>

Pages that duplicate content, either by excessive submission of the same page, submitting the same pages from multiple domains, or submitting the same content from multiple hosts

Pages that are machine-generated with minimal or no content, whose sole purpose is to get a user to click to another page

Pages that contain only links to other pages

From AllTheWeb: http://www.alltheweb.com/info/about/spam_policy.html

exclude Page Spam documents from our index or at least disregard links from it when computing static rank

The Alternative:

If your keyword phrases are relevant to your site content, then it follows that the content will naturally include those relevant keyword phrases. If not, then you need to either rethink that content and its presentation - or rethink your choice of keyword phrases. It's really that simple. Each page of your site can and should have its own topic and its own set of relevant keyword phrases. Make sure that every page of your site contains a Title, a Meta description, and Meta keywords (again those keyword phrases that are relevant to that page).

Then when you submit your "home" page to a search engine, it can spider your entire site through your linked pages, picking up all that Meta information so that each page gets listed properly. In a sense, every page on your site becomes sort of a "Doorway" to the rest of the site. Concentrate on building content, and give the engines just what they want to see anyway: relevant content.

When submitting your web site to directories, submit each page you want listed (with the relevant search terms for that page).

Then of course, it is a matter of sitting back and waiting unless you opt for one of the "express" listing services or "pay-per-click" placement - but those are separate topics, deserving of their own articles. With straight submission, it will take some time for your site to even get listed, but once you're there you can get very targeted traffic for a very long time to come.

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