

## **Cleaning Up the Messes – Reviving a Site Banned for Spamming**

By Jim Hedger, StepForth News Editor, [StepForth Placement Inc.](#)

The firm I work for, StepForth Placement is making a service out of cleaning up other people's search marketing messes. That alone is not big news. As a part of our general services SEO firms have been cleaning up other people's messes for years. What is big news is that Google finally appears to be taking action against some of the most egregious forms of "black-hat" SEO techniques. Cleaning up messy SEO might be more important than ever.

We think the timing for such a service is especially good. Google's Big Daddy upgrade appears to be capable of cutting spam from its spider's diet. Eating right is the path to good health, at least according to almost every nutritionist I've met, each of who would agree with the adage, you are what you eat. That old saying is absolutely true for search engine indexes, which are entirely made up of material consumed and copied by their spiders. The upgrading of Google's data network appears to include a structured dietary plan and Google is obviously not shy about insulting a few iron chefs.

For the past few days, the search marketing world has been abuzz with the news BMW's German language site was banned by Google for using a form of cloaking. Basically, the site BMW presented to live-viewers was fundamentally different than the one presented to search engine spiders, a direct violation of user guidelines posted by the search engines. Live visitors saw a graphic based site while search spiders were fed a text based one.

Several discussions have erupted over the move, some of which have challenged the right of Google to de-list a website as important as BMW.de. If Google is going to follow through in the direction it appears to be going, there will be a number of similar discussions to come. Matt Cutts, Google's chief of organic search, has been saying Google is going after SEO spammers for the past few months.

If Google is serious about going after deceptive tactics, they have a lot of fertile ground to quickly cover. Though search has been an advertising medium for over a decade, the past three have been breakthrough years in search marketing. Over the past three years, most businesses have come to understand that search engine marketing is as, or more important, than traditional Yellow Pages advertising, and the least expensive way to get a message to potential customers.

That interest spurred the enormous growth of the SEO industry. There are now far more SEOs than there were in 2002, some of which have learned to practice the aggressive form of SEO known as "black-hat". While considered dangerous and irresponsible by ethics-driven SEO firms, the aggressive optimization techniques tended to get strong results under the most competitive of keywords and phrases. Sometimes, they also draw penalties such as the case with BMW. It is little wonder that those proficient in their practice of dark-art SEO tended to draw mega-dollar contracts.

There are a number of dark-art SEO shops, some of which have grown to be quite large; exploiting cracks in the search algorithms and their customers' technical knowledge. Some of their customers are among the largest corporations in the world. Along with a number of smaller businesses that can't afford to make such mistakes, they are being led down a dangerous and deceptive path.

While generally considered unwise by most long-term search marketers, it is not terribly difficult to deceive a search spider. A glance at search results at Google, Yahoo and MSN shows how easy it can be with some of the largest players in the travel, automotive, publishing and real estate industries using techniques such as cloaking, IP detection, and java script redirects to rank higher than their smaller competitors.

It's not the techniques themselves that are the problem; it is the application of them in order to fool or deceive search spiders. There might be a technically sound reason for designing a site that redirects classes of users based on their IP numbers. There might be a sound (and in some cases officially sanctioned) reason for using cloaking or IP detection to feed different sets of information to different types of site visitor. In the case of search engine optimization however, these techniques must be avoided and apparently will be detected and penalized by [Google's webspam team](#).

Today's [Search Engine Journal](#) carries a story on the BMW ban in which editor Loren Baker asks, "... was this a stupid decision by BMW to run this junk or a stupid decision by their web marketing manager to contract an SEO company that does not have half a clue as to what they are doing?"

For the long-term SEO firms who have spent enough time in the trenches to fully understand how the search engines judge and rank sites, cleaning up the messes made by new or black-hat SEOs has been part of our lives for a long time. Now, there is simply so much messy SEO out there to work on, we are introducing an enhanced service option to address it.

While we are still trying to come up with a label for this service, we have narrowed our options to a few. Here are two names we're working with, Taint-out and Docu-Doc. I am leaning toward the latter personally but regardless of which name we choose, the field is obviously wide open for entry.

Any suggestions for a name?