

Link Cloaking

(Link Redirection)

By Steve Weber

First I will make the distinction between good cloaking and bad cloaking. Bad cloaking (the kind that can get your site banned by the search engines) works like this:

Some web masters employ scripts on their servers which will display one page to regular visitors and a different page to the search engines who visit the page.

The script can tell if the visitor is a regular visitor or a search engine. If a search engine visits, the script may show an innocent looking page about “dog training”. The search engine will think the site is about dog training and will index the site accordingly. Thus the site, if optimized well, will show up in searches for dog training.

However, when a regular person who is searching for “dog training” clicks on that link in the search engines, they are taken to the cloaked page which could be porn or some other spam type site. If Google discovers this, the site will be banned.

The other “good” type of cloaking is used on links and not the whole page. This type of cloaking is done by nearly all affiliate marketers from time to time and is perfectly acceptable. Many people refer to this practice as “Link Redirection” instead of link cloaking.

Many affiliate marketers redirect their links for various reasons. Here is an example:

My friend Alex Major has a huge package of products which I am an affiliate for. Here is my PayDotCom affiliate link:

<https://paydotcom.com/r/4876/steveweber/860690/>

As you can see, it is a really ugly link. Instead of allowing the user to mouse-over the anchor text and seeing the actual affiliate link code, I use a PHP redirect to create a link like this:

<http://www.WeberInternetMarketing.com/resell-ebooks>

Isn't that a lot better looking link! If you click on either one of those links and then buy Alex's product, I will get a commission.

Since the first link has my affiliate link in it, it is possible for humans or some form of spyware or malware software to change my affiliate ID to someone else. If this happens, all of my hard work (and sometimes expensive efforts) will be in vain. The first good reason for using link redirection is to protect you from this type of thievery.

The next reason affiliate marketers cloak links is to simply hide the fact that it's an affiliate link. It simply doesn't look professional to have a naked affiliate link for your visitors to see. It makes your site look low class. Like it or not, affiliate marketers are often put into the same category as used car salesman. The best affiliate marketers not only hide link code by using redirection, but they also provide valuable content for their visitors in order to be credible to both search engines and human visitors.

Lastly, if you have your own email list, some ISP's will block all mails which have links within them to domains different than the sending domain.

Some affiliate links are in this form:

<http://www.kqzyfj.com/click-2021391-10378406>

Believe it or not, this is my affiliate link for GoDaddy. It is not very "human friendly" is it? In other words, I don't want people seeing a link like that on my site if I am sending them to GoDaddy.

Instead I will redirect the link like this:

<http://www.WeberInternetMarketing.com/godaddy>

Both links resolve to the same landing page. Which would you rather have on your page?

Another use of redirection simply works as a redirect for one of your pages which you move to a different folder or domain. Let's say that I had a page at <http://www.WeberInternetMarketing.com/firefox> promoting the Firefox browser (the page has a Google affiliate link on it for the Firefox download).

What if I wanted to move that page to its own domain? Since I had promoted that link in numerous places, I did not want to lose those future clicks. Also, I did not want to have the page duplicated on two different sites. So I can use a PHP 301 redirect to “officially” redirect the page. By official, I mean that this kind of redirect is “Google friendly”. In other words, the page rank will be passed along to the new page. By the way, if you click on the above link, it will redirect you to this site: <http://www.download-browser.com>. So instead of having my Firefox download page on weberinternetmarketing.com, I now have it at download-browser.com

So how can you create those cool redirects yourself? First you have to find out if your web host supports PHP. Most hosts do support PHP. You can look on the host’s site for info about this or call them. Or you can simply try it and see if it works.

Be aware that redirecting with a simple PHP script will not secure your links against affiliate link hijacking. This is not near the problem it used to be, but I did want to make your aware of that.

How to Redirect with an index.php file:

Here is a quick and easy way to create simple PHP redirects.

First create a folder in your site’s directory which you want to use in your cloaking URL. In the above link, I created a folder called “cloaking” on my site’s root.

Next, open a text editor like notepad and paste the following code into the new file. DO NOT use a word processor for this. It must be a text editor like notepad.

```
<?php header( "Location: http://www.TheNewPage.com " ); ?>
```

Replace <http://www.TheNewPage.com> with your affiliate link or the page you want to redirect to. Then save the file into the folder you created with the file name index.php and upload the folder and file to your server.

For example, here is a real PHP redirect for one of my cloaked URL’s:

```
<?php header( "Location: http://www.kqzyfj.com/click-2021391-10378406 " ); ?>
```

The kqzyfj.com link is my affiliate link to GoDaddy.

The name for this text file is index.php. I have the file saved in a folder called "godaddy". So, when you go to www.WeberInternetMarketing.com/godaddy, you are redirected to GoDaddy.com with my affiliate link.

If you have links on other pages of your site pointing to a folder with a PHP redirect, use a "no follow" tag in front of the link in order not to confuse the search engines. Here is an example of how to use the "no follow" tag:
the link test

If you want to use a 301 PHP redirect, this is the code to use:

```
<?
header("HTTP/1.1 301 Moved Permanently");
header("location: http://www.NewPageLocation.com");
exit();
?>
```

This 301 redirect is Google safe and will properly redirect one of your pages to a different folder or domain you own. Any page rank the redirected page had will be passed along to the new page.