

Picket line – Which side are you on

To err is human and thus forgivable, if the mistake is done unintentionally. As human beings we have been empowered with the ability to judge things contextually. Machines on the other hand run on algorithm, a compilation of instructions which govern their functioning and hence cannot draw relevance to context. This inherent characteristic of human beings and machines create a situation which is equally good and bad.

The good bit first. Working on set instructions make machines unbiased. It would judge a given situation under different conditions in the same fashion. A human being, on the other hand, might judge the same situation differently under heterogeneous conditions. Apply this to search engine marketing and search engines, and we have a situation in hand wherein everyone is judged by the same yardstick.

Search engine optimization is mostly self taught and thus different SEO professionals approach things in varied manner. The Internet marketing industry is yet to form consensus on rules and regulations which would govern the industry. What we do have is, a rough classification of SEO practices which are classified as white hat, black hat and grey hat. Though search engines provide guidelines on what is acceptable and what is not, however, a practice that might be considered ethical by one may be deemed as unethical by another. Many organizations and individuals have fallen victim to this precarious situation.

The line demarcating the color of hat (white, black or grey) is obscure. Professionals who have been practicing Search Engine Optimization for a considerable amount of time can still not draw the line of distinction. A nouveau in the absence of crystal clear parameters is most likely to falter. Anyone learning a new skill is bound to make mistakes. This act may be unintentional but would attract the same penalty as someone doing fraud. 'Ignorance is bliss' but not in this industry. A small slip up would cost you dear and before you realize, the damage would have been done.

Search engines cannot distinguish between an unintentional mistake and an intentional fraud. It will treat both as spam, and would take punitive action to penalize the offender. The margin for error is non-existent as search engines do not give any leeway. Many of us would consider this as unfair but the line needs to be drawn and someone has to do it. Situations like this always claim a few victims, and this would do more good than harm to the Online Marketing business. We all need to take a step back and look at the bigger picture. We should not forget that while there are many ethical SEO practitioners, some dubious and notorious practitioners also exist.

Search engines are not flawless and some of the mistakes and/or fraud will go unnoticed. Fraudsters will keep on exploiting these loopholes for their benefits. As technology advances, spamming will become exponentially difficult but the truth is that it would never become obsolete. The intention of the industry should be to safeguard the interest of firms and individuals who lack knowledge due to absence of industry wide standards. SEO industry requires standards, standards that would go a long way in addressing contentious issue like this. We need it and need it fast.

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