

CLOAK YOUR WEB LINKS AND PROTECT YOUR AFFILIATE COMMISSIONS

Second Edition

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SUMMARY

Knowledge is Power!

With only basic web design **Knowledge**:

- > visitors can steal your web code,
- > can enclose your pages in their sites,
- > can hijack your affiliate links and your commissions,
- > can grab all your references,
- > and your email addresses,
- > and so forth.

With a little more **Knowledge**, you can find commercial products to help protect your intellectual property.

Several affiliate link protection products cost upwards of \$37 - \$59. Some install on your web site, while others are subscription services on remote sites.

These products cloak the cloaking methods in secrecy.

With the **Knowledge** in this report, you can insert the link protection yourself, and have full control.

After placing the code to cloak your links, you can encrypt your web pages.

Low cost and free encryption programs are available from download sites, and can conceal your site code from most people, examples below.

Real hackers can break your encryption, but most would probably not want to invest the necessary time, unless some one pays them (e.g., FBI, KREMLIN, Mother-in-law...).

This report describes how to:

STEP 1, replace long links with short URLs, and hide your real target from the browser's URL address line.

and

STEP 2, replace plain HTML code with encrypted code.

CLOAK CLICKABLE LINK

Mousing over `<u>this link</u>` shows the target URL in browser status bar.

This `<u>link</u>` is hidden from status bar, during mouse over.

Note that both links briefly appear in status bar when clicked.

More is needed to conceal information from browser status bar and from URL-address window on target pages. If your payment links are visible in the URL, people can hijack your affiliate commissions or change your prices.

The most secure methods require access to the host files, which pretty much rules out free web sites. However, only amateurs refuse to register their own web domains.

Use link replacement via URL redirection, also called domain forwarding. Various domain registration companies will set up domain forwarding, for small cost or free, such as <http://www.mydomain.com/> Such free forwarding is handy if you don't have a web site, but is also very easy to setup on your own site.

Here are several tested methods for the URL redirection, with comments leading up to my preferred approach.

1: REDIRECTION WITH JAVA SCRIPT

```
<HTML>
<HEAD></HEAD>
<BODY>
<script language="javascript">
<!-- Browser shield
window.location.href="http://think.biz/contact.
htm";// --></script>
Transfer process is briefly visible in browser
status bar.
</body>
</html>
```

(The body tags can be omitted.)

Substitute your own target page or affiliate code for the "window.location.href=" phrase, and save this code to a file name that you will use, such as "redir1.htm".

Comment: This will work on most current generation browsers. Your file name appears in the URL address line, briefly, then is replaced by the target file name. If this is an affiliate link, that link does not appear in the URL window of browser.

2: BASIC META TAG REDIRECTION

Create a file on your domain called affiliate1.html. Insert

```
<HTML>
<HEAD>
<META HTTP-EQUIV="Refresh" CONTENT="0;
URL=http://youraffiliatelink">
</HEAD>
</html>
```

and save.

Use "<http://yourdomain.com/affiliate1.html>" in place of your affiliate link in your promotion pages. The target URL will appear in browser address window.

3: FRAME PAGE REDIRECT METHOD

This way is friendly to search engine rankings.

There are strong arguments for using or not using frames. This will be a sort of bare-bones example, with recovery feature in case the browser has been disabled for frames.

Make an affiliate2.htm file with the following contents:

```
<HTML>
<HEAD>
<TITLE>URL Redirect with frames</TITLE>
<META NAME="DESCRIPTION" content="try it out">
<META NAME="KEYWORDS" content="product name,
associated keywords">
</HEAD>
<FRAMESET ROWS=100%,* BORDER=0 FRAMEBORDER=0
FRAMESPACING=0>
<FRAME NAME=top
SRC="http://full-affiliate2-link" NORESIZE>
<!-- This section is for frames disabled -->
<NOFRAMES>
<BODY>          [cont'd]
Click here for
<A HREF="http://full-affiliate2-link">
```

```
See report</A>  
</body>  
</NOFRAMES>  
</FRAMESET>  
</HTML>
```

Note that, for users with frames disabled, the viewer has the old style "click here" hyperlink.

Comment on methods 1 - 3:

If you use meta tags for description, keywords, title, you can copy those into your URL redirection file. Some search engines will recognize your tags in ranking your site. Other search engines reject sites with any redirection.

4: Host Script method

You can place a script file in the /cgi-bin/ directory of your web site that will make substitutions and / or insertions for you. A basic example is as follows.

```
    affill.pl or affill.cgi
    #!/usr/local/bin/perl
    print "Location:
http://full-affiliate1-link \n\n";
    exit(0);
```

Upload this to your /cgi-bin/ and CHMOD to 755.

Now, instead of calling `http://full-affiliate1-link`, you place `http://yourbiz.com/cgi-bin/affill.cgi`. One nice feature is that the script cannot be viewed through a browser.

An alternative version, for Google, is

```
#!/usr/bin/perl -w
use strict;
print 'Status: 302 Moved',
"\r\n",
'Location: http://www.google.com',
\r\n\r\n";
```

Outside of /cgi-bin/, you can place `affil1.htm` with contents

```
<? header
('Location:http://full-affiliate1-link');
?>
```

which is a PHP script. Link to that page for fast redirection.

Comment: If you call your script directly, the command can look like an affiliate link, even if the script is for something else. However, if you use one of the redirection methods of 1 to 4, you can make the call appear very brief.

5. USE PROPERTIES OF INDEX.HTM

If your browser reaches a site folder with no index.htm[] or default.htm[], you will see a list of every file in that folder. Thus it is a good idea to always have such a named file present, even if there is nothing in it. Then, casual browsing to that folder will open that file.

This means that you can put all your target link into that index.htm, and call it just by the folder name.

Example: <http://think.biz/freed1>

This trick can be used to shorten any apparent link, including very long affiliate links which immediately tell visitors that the page owner is a third party seller.

ENCRYPT YOUR HTML CODE

True encryption requires some powerful software. An example is that PayPal.com offers encrypted buy buttons, but that is irreversible. However, your HTML pages, other than the actual HTML tags, can be concealed from casual viewing through numeric encoding of characters.

Most current generation browsers can read code-substituted characters, such as the hexadecimal or unicode / decimal representations of the alphabetic characters, numerals, and basic punctuation marks. If you know what I am talking about, and have the necessary reference tables, you can manually decode the most commonly used encryption methods. Most of your visitors won't be that computer literate.

Rather than encrypt your HTML code by hand, you can write a little filter program that will take every character in your code file that is not an HTML tag, and substitute from a character look-up table. Or you can find some free programs on software download sites to do this for you. Or you can pay a moderate amount of money for programs that do this and more, such as to protect links from appearing on the browser status bar, disable the visitors's right mouse button in the browser window, dis-allow your pages from being in the browser cache files, prevent the browser from viewing copies of your pages that have been saved to the visitor's computer, and so forth. Some programs will let you omit sections of your file, such as the meta tags.

Note that this character code substitution can double or triple the bytes-size of your file. Some encryption programs try to save space by skipping some of the original characters. Unless your files are very large, I suggest encrypting all characters, except for any deliberately omitted sections, such as the meta tags.

I previously recommended two programs, TagsLockPro <<http://thimk.biz/tagslock>>, and WebProtector <<http://thimk.biz/webprotect/>>. Both of these can block moused-over links from appearing in the browser's status bar (lower edge in IE, NS, FF). Tagslock also lets you specify a message for the status bar, with the option for horizontal scrolling. I found out the hard way that not all of their features work the same way (or at all) on all popular browsers. Also, as described above, protected links can briefly appear on status bar when clicked.

I now recommend performing the numeric encoding yourself, by free program or look-up tables. Some low cost programs permit one to uncode the results, if needed.

I have written a program that allows choice of hexadecimal or unicode / decimal coding, and which can uncode a mixture of both methods and plain text. If you work with a phrase at a time, you can mix deci and hexi codings.

Go to <http://thimk.biz> and look for En-De-Code.exe. The HELP that comes with the program gives examples of various methods which can be copied and pasted into test pages. It shows that buy links can be protected from viewing in the page HTML, the browser status bar, and the target URL in address bar.

USE SEVERAL METHODS

An example for protecting PayPal.com buy links is to use their <FORM> method, with or without their encryption, which hides important data from both the browser status bar and the target page's URL address. If you want to be able to recover your originals, use unicode / decimal encoding on your HTML page, which keeps non experts from viewing the raw text. Look-up tables, or programs with un-code option, can then reveal the raw text.

Cloak individual links with URL redirection and #5.

CONCLUSION

This report shows several ways to replace long links with brief URL substitutions. This can hide the contents of affiliate links, protect you from commission theft, and also disguise affiliate products as your own. If your site is on a fast host, the time lost by the redirection process will be a few seconds or almost immediate.

If any of this has been useful to you, please recommend that friends visit <http://think.biz>.

About the Author:

Dr. D. A. Miller is an alumnus of IBM R&D in semiconductor VLSI.

Donald's first PC was an early model IBM that arrived at his office with 64Kb of RAM, two 360Kb floppy drives, and DOS 1.1. A third party multifunction board brought the system up to 256Kb and added a battery powered clock for system time. WOW!

Initially, the 13 inch monitor could only do low resolution monochrome text, no graphics, and the printer was an Epson 8 pin dot-matrix line printer, text only, with the IBM logo.

Donald's programming skills evolved with the PC architecture, as he found it easier, in those early days, to make most of his own software, rather than try to keep up with the emerging commercial offerings. IBM co-workers helped with their own nifty programs they made available on the internal network, such as powerful editors that could be used for programming or basic text. Now Donald considers himself to be an advanced end-user, not a developer or programmer.

He can be reached at <http://think.biz/contact.htm>. Other reports can be found at <http://think.biz>.