

## What Is Black Hat SEO?

The field of search engine optimization (SEO) is filled with SEO techniques that look attractive to new webmasters and can get them temporary gains, but will ultimately cause their pages to be penalized heavily in the search results or dropped from search engines entirely. These SEO techniques, called "black hat" techniques after old cowboy movies in which the villains wore black hats, are considered unethical because they deceive visiting search engines about the sites real content, and often make pages ugly or unusable for human visitors.

Illegible text is a classic black hat SEO trick. Setting a font size too small for humans to read, coloring text to match or blend with the page background, or hiding it behind a div block or floating image are all considered attempts to trick search engines, and pages that use these methods excessively are penalized. (Legitimate uses of hidden text, such as CSS navigation that hides descriptive text until the reader mouses over a link, are not penalized.)

To avoid penalties for hidden text, set all the text on your site to be large enough to read and colored to provide a strong contrast with the background, and make sure page elements do not accidentally cover text.

Keyword stuffing is another black hat SEO technique, even more annoying to the user because unlike unreadable text, the keywords are usually visible on the page. The webmaster packs the page title and page body with keywords, sometimes relevant to the page and sometimes completely off the wall. Some webmasters stuff the keyword meta tag as well, although this is one of the oldest black hat SEO techniques and has caused most search engines to ignore the keyword meta tag. To avoid being penalized for this common SEO mistake, give your pages natural sounding titles and do not put any text on the page that does not pertain to the pages topic.

More sophisticated webmasters spread out the keywords within the body of the text instead of piling them in a single paragraph. Search engines filter out pages that use this SEO trick by giving preference to pages with a certain keyword density, and penalizing pages whose keyword density is higher.

Because of the eternal nature of spammers, the target density has been sliding ever lower for the past several years. To avoid penalties for having a poor keyword density, keep track of the currently desirable density via webmaster forums, and rewrite pages if their keyword density is too high.

Technologically sophisticated webmasters present different content to the search engines than to human viewers, resulting in "doorway pages" that have been optimized to search engines, instead of humans, preferences. Doorway pages are strongly penalized. Avoiding being penalized for doorway pages is simple: Just dont make one.

If you find that you have accidentally used one of these black hat SEO techniques, use good SEO to remedy the mistake, and watch for any inadvertent misuse of SEO techniques in the future. In the long run, less flashy white hat SEO techniques will drive your page farther than any black hat SEO trick.

## About the Author

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