

Article Plagiarism: the Next Internet Ripoff?

Content is King! shout the search engines. That's what the search engines love. We also love the non-reciprocal links that we get for our websites when our articles are published on other peoples' sites with our resource boxes dutifully appended below them.

To create a well written article takes time and effort. We have to get everything right: it has to be of relevance to the reader in that subject field; it has to be well researched; all spelling, punctuation and grammar must be correct; it has to be a genuine contribution to that particular area of specialization, and so interesting that the editor will jump at the chance of publishing it. And, oh yes, all the right keywords have to be there, of the right density and in the correct proportions.

The well-crafted article must satisfy both the reader and the bot; both the aesthetics of the eye and the strictures of the code. So those of us who try and be at least a little bit serious about things know that a second draft is always necessary, and then a third. Then it's best to sleep on it. Even after that, we know that we have to forget about it for a few days until we are able to come back to it again with a freshly critical mind. You prune it and nurture it. You take off the sharp edges and you tighten it up. If necessary you know when you have to tear it up and start over again.

Only after we have got it absolutely right - and then after spending many hours submitting to directories, editors of ezines, article announcement sites and individual webmasters - are we rewarded, perhaps, with those hard-won non-reciprocal inbound live hyperlinks.

But wait. There seems to be a problem. It appears that an increasing number of people are quite happy to simply copy and paste our work onto their own sites without a link back. Or they don't bother to check if the link is 'live'.

That would be bad enough. But there are other people who print our articles and then don't even bother to name the person who wrote it.

But there's far worse: those people who print our article and then announce to the world that they wrote it themselves! Some of those even have the temerity to add the copyright sign next to their name!

I may be being a bit too harsh. Perhaps these people don't realize that they're doing anything wrong. After all, the Internet was originally conceived as ownerless and based upon free and open source information. And I can think of nothing more Public Domain, in fact or in spirit, than the World Wide Web.

Yet just consider what it is these people are doing. They are stealing other peoples' work and passing it off as their own. They are effectively also stealing the web traffic that goes with it, the traffic that our labors should be rewarding our websites with, and diverting it to their own. This is blatant plagiarism. It just should not happen. Theft is theft, in whatever medium.

I wrote an article a few months ago on Internet marketing for small businesses. A search for the title of that article on Google now returns 10,800 pages, so at least the title itself has been reproduced that number of times and in that number of different places. A search for a chunk of text from the middle of the article returns 536 pages, which suggests that the article text has been published in its entirety no fewer than 536 times. Great! So now I have 536 inbound links from that one article! Wrong.

I looked at individual entries of the article and in a surprising number of cases there were no backlinks at all. Also surprising - and somewhat sickening - was the number of individuals who wantonly attached their own names to my work.

I recently posted the same article to a fresh source of publishers. I was astonished at the response of one editor of a well-known directory who had rejected the article on the grounds that it was not mine! She had seen the same piece on many other websites under different names, she said, and it was not her policy to publish work that had been produced using "cookie cutter" techniques. I wrote back saying that it really was my own work, citing the URL of SitePro News where it originally aired as that day's headline feature. She apologized and was even good enough to supply me with a list of names of people and sites who had published it as their own. I'm so tempted to publish their names here (perhaps I will on my blog; so watch out!) but have decided that discretion should rule. For the moment, at least.

But I think there is a clear message here. The fashion for article writing and publishing for content and backlinks is going through the roof at the moment. It's like a mini Internet boom all of its own. And like any other boom it has attracted its own inevitable pack of rat-racers, chancers, charlatans and cheats; shysters who go for the shortcuts every time, while remaining quite happy for other people to do their work for them.

For the record, the convention is this: distribute and publish the article freely by all means. But it must be published in its entirety and unedited, and MUST include the resource box with a live hyperlink back to the author's site (or wherever the author wants, for that matter).

Hey, now even my lawyer understands!

Next time I will publish their names gleefully, and be damned.

Source: <http://www.articlecircle.com>

About the Author

Gordon Goodfellow is an Internet marketing practitioner who lives and works in London, UK. His workload has been greatly reduced with the help of the useful article publishing tool found at <http://www.applied-web-marketing.com/aa.htm>