Grey Hat SEO

Somewhere between black hat and white hat is the murky grey area. Grey Hat SEO is the practice of using technically legal methods to improve your site rankings, but which are ethically dubious, and could one day become black hat. Think of it like legal highs. They might be legal today and get you high, but in a couple of years' time you could get punished for using them when the law changes to catch up with the new compounds.

It's very easy to use Black Hat SEO and get found out. It's a bit harder to get caught using grey hat SEO for example, it's difficult sometimes for Google to know whether you have paid for links.

Grey hat SEO involves much more creativity than Black hat SEO. The reason Grey hat SEO is less known about is that as soon as the search engines become aware that people are using these techniques, they take steps to prevent them, which turns a grey hat technique into a black hat technique.

At the risk of exposing Grey hat SEO here is a list of some of the things that are technically legal, but outside the realms of white hat SEO:

1. **SEO Squatting:** buy up expired domains which are relevant to your keywords and then add some pages of content with a few well-placed backlinks to your site. Make sure that the new content is good quality and not too different from what the website hosted before. Put some AdWords on the new content and then do some satellite SEO on it to keep up its trust rank.

2. **Create Social media accounts for your pets**. Really this works. Get some cute stories and pictures, then one day your pet suddenly develops an interest in power tools, or mobility aids, or whatever website you are trying to promote. This will then create social search links back to your website. Not against Google's rules to do this, but could contravene the social media that it is hosted on. Then again, who's going to sue a dog?

3. **Redesign your website at regular intervals** - even if the content is more or less the same, because the code and text changes, Google thinks that this is fresh content.

4. **Add a comments box to your site pages and invite anyone to comment**. Sure it could get you 9 million spammers to put their links on there, but if you only approve the less spammy ones and then replace their links with a rel=nofollow tag, this means that you get no backlinks bleeding your page rank, but what you do get is lots of fresh content with hopefully relevant text for no effort on your part.

5. **Link yourself higher**. Whenever you put a comment on any blog, always make an excuse to link back to yourself. While you're at it, get into the habit of being very helpful. Join forums where you can post solutions to other people's problems. Moneysavingexpert.com is a great one as it gets lots of traffic and has a plethora of relevant topics.

6. **Use those sharing buttons unashamedly** - add Google+ Facebook like and tweet this buttons everywhere you can. Then click on them yourself a few times. Get your dog to click on them too (see tip 2 above).

7. This is a really sneaky one- **set up a targeted paid directory** specialising in one field - e.g. if you are trying to promote power tools, call it a 'power tools review website'. Then add all your competitors to the directory. Add some content over the next few weeks, then after a few weeks, change the website to say that all links on the site require a $199 inclusion fee, and then report all the competitor sites on the directory as paying for links. This is an example of negative SEO which is difficult to ban you for.

8. **Use the free AdWords vouchers** that you get in computer magazines. Every month I get PC Pro magazine and every month it has a £50 AdWords voucher in it. Generally I set up new temporary AdWords accounts, whack in the 50 quid code and set them going. Bosh. Easy traffic for free.

9. **Fabricate news** – news websites are desperate for content, and quite a few of them have very lax authentication procedures. If you can fabricate some news and maybe get yourself a few backlinks or twitter shares on the back of it, then you can potentially get a lot of traffic.

10**. Charity links**. Select a few relevant small charities, make a small donation and write an article about the good work that they do with a link to their donation page and then ask them to link back to you as thanks: paid links but without the Google penalty.

11. **Use Negative SEO** - this is a collection of techniques which you can find out more about in the Negative SEO. Essentially this is forcing other websites above you down in the rankings to help your own ranking. There are 11 techniques on this page:

- Promote non offending content - "Insulation"
- Google Bowling
- Site Infection
- Tattling
- Guilty by Association
- False duplicated content
- Denial of Service Attacks (DOS)
- Click Fraud
- AdSense Banning
- Black social bookmarking

Read the relevant chapter on Negative SEO for more details on these tactics.

12. **Use Keyword Association Manipulation** - this is when you associate two unrelated keywords together to try to fool bots into thinking that they are related or synonymous. This is quite an advanced technique and takes a lot of work to achieve on highly competitive keywords.

13. **Use a subscription based service to hide non relevant content** - a bit like cloaking, you are showing different content to spiders, but if you have a subscription based service - even if it's just a 'click here to prove you are over 12 years old' button, you can get away with having one set of content for spiders (and people who claim to be under 12 - in which case they would get a less interesting set of pages about the joys of power tools) and another set for most other people.

14**. Pay another site to put the Google authentication html file on their website**. Then add the site to Google webmaster tools and use the 'change of address' tool to redirect linkjuice back to your

website. This is not paying for links because there are no direct links that go back to your site which are paid for, so you are just paying for the link juice. The webmaster that you are paying will be aware that this is what you are doing and if they agree to it, it's not against the webmaster guidelines (yet).

15. **Spun content** - this is copying content from another site but changing some words around so search engines cannot automatically spot the plagiarism. Another method is to take content from more than one page- like they say, "copying from one source is plagiarism, copying from more than one source is research" A good way to do this is to use lists like X SEO techniques then steal some items from other peoples list and compile your own. If you add a few extra ideas in, it becomes your own. See how I recopied this paragraph from the black hat SEO section above?

16. **Write negative reviews** - when people are researching products or services they are much more likely to read negative reviews than positive ones so they know what to look out for.

17. **Link chaining** - In the old days of the world wide web, before search engines became ubiquitous, there were a lot of 'web rings' - these are sites that join a group or 'web ring' and each site puts a bit of JavaScript code on their page. The web ring hub site would then write links into this code so that each website in the ring had links to the next one. In this way you could cycle between all the sites in the ring. Link chaining is a similar method whereby you create rings of sites and each links to the next one in the ring. None of the sites themselves have more than one chained link and they all have different IP addresses, so cannot be associated as a 'bad neighbourhood'

18. **Pay for reviews** - there are plenty of people out there who write reviews on websites in exchange for money. The blogwhores will write about any old subject as long as they are getting paid, and this is perfectly legal.

19. **Free Stuff**! Everyone likes getting something for free, so why not put voucher codes for relevant products on your site. You can get plenty of codes from online voucher code websites (Just Google 'voucher codes') and pop a 'voucher of the day' feature on your website. Technically this is not plagiarism or duplicated content, but if you push this feature on twitter, Facebook etc. You'll attract lots of traffic.

20. **Content repositioning** – The premise is thus: most people only read the first few sentences on a page before they lose interest. Therefore, having call to action at the top of the page is very handy. On the downside, the more keyword themed content which is better for search engines is less likely to grab someone's attention. Therefore, you should move your content on the page itself so the SEO friendly stuff but lower conversion text is at the top of the code, but bottom of the page. This can be achieved by various means such as using CSS floats, CSS absolute positioning, jQuery append() methods or many other ways. You can also create jQuery animations to change content position, or possibly ajax to insert content. All of which is technically allowed (for now)

For balance, it must be pointed out that the concept of Grey hat SEO is a contentious issue. Some people believe that Grey Hat SEO is just a less obvious form of Black Hat SEO, and some argue that there's no such thing as Grey Hat SEO, just lucky people who get away with it for a while.