

AFFILIATE LAUNCHES MADE SIMPLE with Matt McWilliams

The Absolute #1 Way to Get Your Best New Affiliates (That Almost No One Uses)

To cloak or not to cloak...that is the question. Cloaking affiliate links is one of the most controversial issues in affiliate marketing. Some call it "black hat" others don't. They see it as an important part of their affiliate marketing strategy. So, should you cloak your affiliate links?



So first off, what the heck is link cloaking?

Link Cloaking Defined

Link cloaking is anything that makes it difficult to see the end URL on the front end. This could be as simple as using something like Pretty Link to create a link.

So for instance, instead of this:

<https://xe172.isrefer.com/go/SPS/matt7267/>

we use this:

mattmcwilliams.com/sps.

Without digging in a little bit, you don't necessarily know where that link is going to.

Now you can figure out that it's going to the Self-Publishing School free training based on the fact that I would tell you in the email that I sent you where it was going. But it's not necessarily evident exactly where it is going on the front end.

Even the ugly link (<https://xe172.isrefer.com/go/SPS/matt7267/>) is a cloak in and of itself because that redirects to a landing page such as this:

<https://selfpublishingschool.leadpages.co/aff-eg-webinar-registration-page/?affiliate=54>.

[callout]RECOMMENDED PROGRAM: Interested in promoting Chandler Bolt's Self-Publishing School? Learn more here. [/callout]

During the "Wild West" phase of affiliate marketing (pre-2008), many affiliates cloaked their links for nefarious purposes.

Their intention was to deceive potential customers and the merchants they were promoting. They didn't want anyone to know where their links were going.

This is the "black hat" use of affiliate cloaking.

They would do this so customers couldn't see where they were sending them. They would run ads that weren't clear, promise free points and other things that weren't actually available.

Because of this, they didn't want visitors to see where they were actually sending them.

It deceived the merchants because they couldn't make heads or tails of where traffic was coming from.

Often the bad apples in the affiliate industry would use multiple redirects and layers upon layers of cloaking to deceive pretty much everyone involved.

This led to a lot of fraudulent transactions and "cookie stuffing", especially in the lead generation business.

Back in the 2000's, I spent quite a bit of time running the affiliate program for a company I started in the insurance leads industry and this was something we had to fight on a daily basis.

Link Cloaking Today

Most link cloaking today is *not* used for nefarious purposes.

It's used for the simple reason that I mentioned above.

Let's be honest, mattmcwilliams.com/sps is a heck of a lot prettier than <https://xe172.isrefer.com/go/SPS/matt7267/>.

It's used for mentioning on podcasts, videos, live streams as well as emails -- just to be shorter.

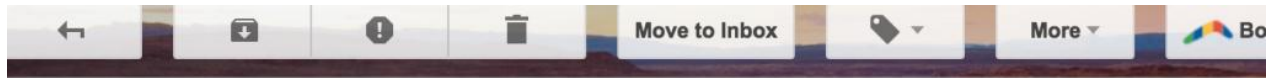
Even cloaking my blog posts.

For instance, a blog post I did recently I did on what to do if your optins are converting to sales had a link of:

<http://www.mattmcwilliams.com/optins-arent-converting-affiliate-sales>

But when I emailed my list, I used the URL:

mattmcwilliams.com/conversion.



So what do you do when it does?

In today's post I answer a question from my new friend Tyler Bream.

Tyler asked,

"When you don't convert opt-ins like you expect how do you pinpoint where things went wrong?"

In this video I share 7 things to consider if you find yourself in a position like Tyler did.

mattmcwilliams.com/conversion

If you've ever experienced this, this is for you.

If you haven't, you might at some point, so you should probably read it too :)

All the Best,
Matt

P.S. I want to know what YOU do when your optins don't convert to sales...share your answer here:

mattmcwilliams.com/conversion

So today, link cloaking isn't necessarily "black hat."

[callout]My favorite tool for creating "pretty links" is aptly named Pretty Link. Check it out here.[/callout]

Why You Should Cloak Your Links

Ultimately there are four reasons you should cloak your links.

1. Appearance

As I've mentioned multiple times above, shorter, cloaked links are usually prettier, they appear better in email. They look nicer than the longer (and uglier) affiliate links.

2. Easier to say

As I also mentioned above, shorter, cloaked links are easier to use in podcasts, videos and live streams. It's easier to say and remember mattmcwilliams.com/sps than <https://xe172.isrefer.com/go/SPS/matt7267/>

3. Tracking

When you used a cloaked link, many times it's for tracking purposes. It's easier to control tracking of hits and other variables when you're using a cloaked link (Pretty Link or short link) of some sort. This is a legitimate reason to cloak your link.

4. Ease of use

In my opinion, this is the biggest reason to cloak your links. I will go in-depth on this below, but it will save you TONS of time and effort.

[callout]Looking for something great to promote? Click here to see all of our recommended affiliate programs. [/callout]

How Link Cloaking Makes Affiliate Marketing Easier

This is by far the best reason to cloak your links. The reason is simple...it's easier to change your affiliate link one time, rather than having to change it dozens (or even hundreds) of places.

For instance, if you talk about a particular product in 50 different blog posts and you link to something individually 50 different times, if they update that link or close down the program, etc., you have to update 50 different blog posts.

#notfun

But if you use a Pretty Link, you just have to update the link one time and all the rest of the links will automatically be right.

Here's what that looks like... just open Pretty Link and update the "Target URL" to the new link you want to redirect to:

Just change this link

Redirection Type*: 307 (Temporary)
 To Enable Cloaked, Meta-Refresh, Javascript, Pixel and Pretty Bar Redirection, upgrade to [Pretty Link Pro](#)

Target URL*:

Pretty Link*:

Title:

Options | Advanced

Group | Parameter Forwarding

There are different reasons you might need to do this.

- **Affiliate program closes down** - If an affiliate program closes down, you need a new link. You could potentially redirect a product mention to a new product, etc.
- **The link changes** - It might just be as simple as, from year to year, a digital product might change their links. And now, instead of changing the link in multiple places, you just update it once.
- **You need to direct to a different page** - Let's say you just want to change where a link goes. You have multiple mentions on your blog and you decide that rather than send them to Version A of a landing page, you want to send them to version B, all you have to do is update the Pretty Link.
- **You decide to promote something else** - For a multitude of reasons, you may decide you want to change the product you promote. Of course, if you mention the product name in the link, this can be a challenge, but if you're linking to "My favorite yoga mat" and you're currently linking to company A, you could easily change to company B, should your favorite yoga mat change.

So those are four reasons why using a "cloaked" link is actually easier on YOU as an affiliate marketer.

As I said above, cloaking your links used to be considered "black hat", but, I believe as more and more of the good apples do it for these reasons it will drown out the bad apples that are doing it for nefarious reasons.

[callout]FREE RESOURCE: What to learn how to find affiliate programs? Sign up for our FREE Mini-Course on Finding Affiliate Programs.[/callout]

[reminder]What's your take on using link cloaking in affiliate marketing?[/reminder]