

You've been framed

NHS Direct Online <www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk>

Mat Jordan
Content Manager, NHS Direct Online

mat.jordan@online.nhsdirect.nhs.uk

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The Bookmarks' article¹ in the June issue of *He@lth Information on the Internet* entitled 'Gateways to health information on the Internet' has raised an important issue for NHS Direct Online with regard to people finding our information. The article stated clearly that our Web site was frames-based.

At first this caused us some confusion, as our site doesn't use frames. However, at length, we discovered that the author had accessed it via a URL owned by someone else, <<http://www.nhsdirect.co.uk>>, which does load our site into frames. It is quite likely that large numbers of other people must have followed a similar route and had a similarly unsatisfying experience.

The URL <<http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk>> is our prime domain. However, in 2001 we started the process of trying to gain control of as many nhsdirect-based domain names as possible and mapping them onto the site. This was largely in response to an analysis of the search terms used by people trying to find the site via search engines. This indicated that many people type in all or part of a URL into the search box. In many cases, they would type in an incorrect URL, typically nhsdirect.com or nhsdirect.org.uk. We also assumed that many people would probably type an inaccurate URL directly into their browser when trying to find the site.

Unfortunately, we have had mixed success in getting related URLs mapped onto the site. The nhsdirect.co.uk domain is owned by a commercial organisation who registered it on behalf of a client. They refused to pass control over to us, but did agree to forward traffic on to our site. Technically, they

didn't actually do this although they did, arguably, facilitate access to our site. Also, as far as I am aware, using frames in this way is not an infringement of our copyright. They reproduced the site as a whole and not as part of another Web site or surrounded by other frames of advertising.

A number of other organisations and individuals who had registered nhsdirect URLs also refused to cooperate and it remains to be seen what they choose to do with the URLs concerned.

From the point of view of a member of the public trying to find health information, this is all pretty irrelevant. Their experience of coming to the site via <<http://www.nhsdirect.co.uk>> would be the same as the author of the article: they would see a framed Web site that doesn't work very well. This not only gives the user a poor experience, but does nothing for our reputation either.

Fortunately, the owner of this particular URL has now agreed to put a forwarding script in place so people are redirected to our site properly. At least that is one of the criticisms of our site fixed. It is also an object lesson in taking a systematic approach to registering and mapping similar URLs onto a main URL at an early stage in development — particularly if your main URL is not as memorable as it could be.

REFERENCE

1. Hall A. Bookmarks: Gateways to consumer health information on the Internet: self-help for the consumer? *He@lth Information on the Internet* 2003; No.33: 8

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