

External Linking Policy - Another Approach

Trying to divide external resources into “commercial” and “non-commercial” [left us with too many questions](#) we didn’t have answers to. So now we are trying a different approach. But before that, let’s include a bit of context here.

Context

All documentation previously lived on Codex and it was editable by any logged-in user. This was **massively abused** to add irrelevant links to a domain with such authority as wordpress.org has. Also, it was almost impossible to be maintained by the Documentation team.

When moved to WordPress, [HelpHub](#) and [DevHub](#), documentation became completely under Make teams’ control. So now we have names of people responsible for the documentation part of wordpress.org. The content wasn’t simply copy/pasted. It is being reviewed, updated with relevant text, screenshots and code examples.

Some links found in old content were dead, some became irrelevant, some were plain promotion and some were still very much valid and useful. We had to decide which ones to keep. It’s a rather obvious and simple decision, right? **Keep the relevant and helpful ones.** Well, who says what’s relevant and helpful? Who makes that decision and based on what criteria?

We don’t want to make these decisions lightly, on a per case basis. We don’t want to give any reason to be accused of exercising power or “helping out friends”. We want to make this transparent and guided by clear rules which will be available to everyone. We want to make documentation better and useful for its users.

TL;DR Previous discussions

If you haven’t read previous discussions, a short summary would be that we tried to define the type of websites which would be allowed. Criteria was to avoid affiliates, promotions of any free or paid products and services. This is important because we have a policy to not recommend any theme or plugin for accomplishing something in WordPress. If we want consistency, we have to keep it in all aspects.

The criteria we came up with here was to avoid “commercial blogs”. The problem is: *what* is a commercial blog? Today we are witnessing more and more blended purposes. Personal blogs with promotion of a book or WordPress theme or plugin (or all of it), all merged under the same domain name.

Also, as a sort of “thank you”, we wanted to give a precedence to active members of the community. But when is someone becoming “active” and what happens when they are not “active” anymore? Does the content automatically become irrelevant and not helpful?

So, these approaches were dead ends.

Another approach

As we were unable to define a set of requirements on a domain level and make it applicable to any website, we are now trying a different approach.

Please keep in mind that we are still discussing all possibilities and these discussions are in form “if we would have this set of rules, how would that look like”. Joining discussion just to say that we are wrong is not helpful nor constructive.

So let’s try with new criteria:

- **License** - External content has to be clearly licensed under license compatible with [GPL v.2+](#).
- **Promotion** - External content (the actual post/page or, perhaps, the whole webpage?) must **not** include recommendation to use any free or paid theme/plugin/service that requires additional installing steps. Only what’s available in fresh WordPress installation is allowed.
- **Affiliates** - External content (the actual post/page or, perhaps, the whole webpage?) must not include any affiliate links.
- **Paywalls** - External content must not be behind the paywall of any sort. The content is offered freely, without any additional actions (payments, registrations, subscriptions, sharing on social networks etc) from the user.
- **Tracking** - External links must not be affiliates itself nor any kind of tracking.

What are we discussing here?

The point of this discussion is to see if these criteria items are the right approach. Is there any other criteria to add to this list? Should we consider the whole webpage or just the article/page content part of it? What could be a potential problem in this approach that we are overseeing?

Please leave your comments.

@theMikeD:

A few things to think about here.

Is an article commercial if the article content:

- contains links to or mentions well-known/obvious commercial site(s)?
- contains banner or other ads injected automatically by ad placement scripts?
- contains affiliate links?

Is an article commercial if the page it exists in:

- is found on a well-known/obvious commercial site?
- contains banner or other ads?
- contains affiliate links?
- contains traffic analysers?
- inserts a popover after x seconds or after reaching x scroll position?

If the content must be GPL, must associated sample code, images and any other assets also be GPL?

@WPZA All this has already been covered in previous discussions. Lets use the zoom call to all get on the same page with the why aspect.