

Ethical SEO Marketing Practices

A Russian Brilliants© Jewelry Case Study*

Let me start out by saying that we have pioneered the use of "microsites" to help companies gain strong Internet SERP results. This case study is an example of where the microsite strategy pushes the boundaries of common sense and fair play. America is defined by capitalism and competition but at what point as Internet Marketing consultants do we say "No!?" In this article we will take a look at the microsite campaign designed by Russian Brilliants®; the positive and negative.

Internet Jewelry Ecommerce Websites

Selling jewelry on the Internet is big business; take a look at the annual report of Blue Nile. Anytime there are large profits to be made on the Internet, the rush to grab a piece of the pie creates a great Internet marketing case study to review. In competitive Internet industries, companies often purchase multiple domain names and create a handful of websites on these domains to market their goods. I like to use the term "microsites" to describe this phenomenon of creating small functioning websites on URL names that are keyword rich. I actually encourage this marketing model for my clients since it is effective when used properly.

Our company website(s) have a number of microsite case study examples including Circle BMW and Mollydooker Winery. The end result achieved by Russian Brilliants® is quite remarkable. They dominate organic search in Google and for some search phrases they own the entire first page of SERP results. To this end, I commend their microsite strategy since it blocks out the competition. What I don't commend is some of the URL choices they have made along the way.

I also commend the marketing team for picking a brand name that is not a common phrase in the English language, so that the term "Russian Brilliants" comes up on Google pages 1, 2 and 3 when people are talking about their product. If the team picked "First Class Diamonds" there would be thousands of articles on Google that would contain the phrase "First Class" and compete for eyeballs.

Domain Name Publishing Ethics

The question at hand is whether using your competitors name (trademarked or not) in your microsite URL names is good business practice or entirely legal. For example, would it be ethical or legal for Pepsi to create a website that is called "www.cocacola-beverages.com" to sell Pepsi products and to encourage consumers to choose Pepsi as their soft drink of choice? That is for the courts to decide. I posed the Pepsi vs. Coke issue as a fictional example of how heated these discussions can get when people use competitor names that have cost millions of dollars to brand.

Russian Brilliants® is a Internet jewelry retailer who is supplied by Hadar Company Inc; which according to the Russian Brilliants® Website is the only authorized distributor for Russian Brilliants® jewelry. They use what I refer to as a "microsite strategy" to sell their diamond simulants.

Microsite Marketing Models

I have been able to identify over 15 websites that are part of the Russian Brilliants® microsite marketing model. You can see the effectiveness of their microsite marketing model in this previous article I wrote on Russian Brilliants Diamond Simulant marketing.

- www.russianbrilliants.com
- www.russianbrilliants.net
- www.simulateddiamond.net
- www.ringsforlove.com
- www.belimbing.com
- www.moissanite-engagementrings.com
- www.ido-diamond.com
- www.climbingnews.org
- www.liberussia.org
- www.digitalascension.org
- www.norsetavern.com
- www.russiancreatedgems.com
- www.c0me-on.net
- www.biznizsource.com/moissanite
- www.f4nt4sm4.com
- www.russianice.info

Of this list, a few of the names are perfectly appropriate for a microsite marketing model; simulateddiamond.net is a good example of a keyword rich microsite URL name. The last microsite URL name on the list (f4nt4sm4.com) makes no sense to me. What's odd to me is that HTML page <TITLE> once you enter this website store is: "Fake Diamond with properties of Natural Diamond, Shop for Fake Diamond Jewelry and More". That would not be my first choice for a page title, but it consistent with the website slogan that says "A Fake Diamond That Looks Real" while the other sites use different tag lines.

What forces me to "pause" is the use of the trademarked word "Moissanite" in their retail website located at: **www.moissanite-engagementrings.com**

I am using this example, to start a dialogue via our blog on this matter. I do not have the legal background or case law to answer whether this practice is legal. However, it does invite a discussion on Russian Brilliants® marketing team decisions which could be at the expense of their competitors brand equity. In business I have learned that it is much better to talk positive about what you offer and not talk down a competitor.

The second example, is a hosted ecommerce website at "biznizsource.com" that using the Moissanite name as the subdirectory that hosts the main ecommerce site which sells Russian Brilliants® merchandise. This company also hosts other websites that sell Russian Brilliants including "jewelry4brides.com".

Internet Branding Protection

So, are there any governing bodies that handle cases where a company feels that their brand is being hurt by competitors via a URL name? In an article found on ZDNET, the WIPO made this statement:

"Registering a domain name similar to that of another organisation and then using the URL to protest against its namesake's products or services is acceptable, according to the WIPO. Erik Wilbers, acting director of the Arbitration and Mediation Center at WIPO, says that companies will increasingly lose domain disputes against individuals or groups that use them as a platform for critical speech against a business" according to a story this week in ZDNet."

The key to the above statement and the ruling by the WIPO was that the case in point was not a commercial enterprise. That the person who purchased a domain name "similar" to a hospital domain, where he was treated poorly, was using it only to express his freedom of speech. The website owner was not another hospital trying to bad mouth their competition, trying to confuse the public or sell services at another hospital. Here is another excerpt from the article:

"The reasons were: Redmond is not using the site for any commercial gain and it is immediately apparent to internet users who visit the site that it is not the official site; Redmond, according to the panel, is simply criticising the hospital with opinions which he believes to be true; and it is not obvious that "chelwest" is branding of the hospital."

In the example of Russian Brilliants® ecommerce website at "moissanite-engagementrings.com" , the opening page header is a pitch to compare Moissanite to Russian Brilliants®. In addition, the home page HTML Title is:

<title>Moissanite, Moissanite Rings, & Moissanite Engagement Rings Compared with Russian Brilliants®</title>

It is clear that they are using the term "Moissanite" to divert customers to their website which sells a competing product. SEO basics tell you that home page TITLE tags and URL names are a key resource for getting on Google Page One. The issue of using a competitors name in your URL and also on your home page is a matter for lawyers to argue over. Since the point of this article is to create a discussion on Internet marketing practices.

Questioning Internet Marketing Ethics

So, I ask all web marketers is this good business practice? If there are no ethical boundaries in Internet marketing, what will the web look like in 5 or 10 years? The owners of Moissanite brilliant stones are Charles and Covard and they have spent millions of dollars marketing and branding the term "Moissanite". I am all for a free market and competitive pricing but these marketing tactics just seem to hit "below the belt". Would Tiffany create a website called "harrywinston-engagementrings.com" that sells Tiffany products? What happens when someone attacks your brand equity?

The point I am making is that Russian Brilliants® has the right to free speech and should express their product comparisons on their websites like "russianbrilliants.net" but I don't think that expressing them on "moissanite-engagementrings.com" is good business marketing ethics.

Using .ORG Domains to Sell Retail Goods

The last point on this discussion on Internet Marketing tactics is the use of ".org" domain names for retail commerce. In my opinion, the public expects the ".org" domain name to be used for charitable organizations, free speech or public forums. I question the marketing advice given to Russian Brilliants® web design team to use URL names such as "wwwclimbingnews.org" to sell diamond Simulants. As a consumer, I would think twice about buying jewelry from websites that have URL names that have no connection with the products they sell. There is no law against using .org domains to sell retail goods, it's just bad taste in my opinion and I would not recommend that decision to my clients.

If you would like to contact the author Brian Pasch or add your comments to this topic, send a note to brian@paschconsulting.com.

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