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The NimbleHost RapidWeaver Blog

Why Cruftless Links Are Better for SEO

by JONATHAN on NOVEMBER 8, 2012

A number of customers have been contacting us recently with concerns about changing the file names for their RapidWeaver pages. The reason for this is because we have two different plugins (Mobilize and RapidSearch Pro) that require PHP, and as such, require a .php file extension to be used.

These customers are worried that by changing the file extension for their pages, that they'll lose their hard-earned ranking in search results. In this post I'm going to explain why cruftless links are better for SEO, and how by using them you'll never have to worry about the effect changing file names can have on your search ranking.

The typical RW user starts making sites and often decides to change the default file name for their pages to be more descriptive. This is a good thing! The problem is that it can also cause problems down the road. Let's look at an example with a mythical RW friend we'll call "John".

John creates a new RW page in his project and decides to use the Stacks page type for a cool image gallery. He thinks it would be a good idea to change the file name to `photos.html`, as that looks easier to understand than the default of `index.html`. He makes the site, gets great rankings whenever someone searches for `bigfoot photos`, and is a Happy Man.

As his site grows in popularity he decides to improve things by adding some new stacks, and one of these stacks requires PHP. John's worried that by changing the file name from `photos.html` to `photos.php`, he'll lose the great ranking he has when someone looks for `bigfoot photos`. Here is where cruftless links have a huge advantage.

But first, you may be wondering what a "cruftless link" is to begin with. Sounds kind of nasty, like a moldy pie or something. In fact, it's pretty awesome.

In this particular situation "cruft" refers to any extra stuff that is part of a link we don't need. And as it turns out, if your page's file name is called `index.html` or `index.php` or `index.something` then web browsers don't

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need the file name at all. They'll just load page file names that are "index" automatically for you. That's why you can visit a site like Apple just by typing in "apple.com" – there's no need to also enter the file name. Here are some examples of cruftless links:

apple.com/iphone

nimblehost.com/blog

realmacsoftware.com/rapidweaver

Note how none of the links above have a file name as part of the link. Now here are some examples of links *with* cruft, and then with the cruft removed:

bigfootsupersite.com/photos.html **eww, crufty link**

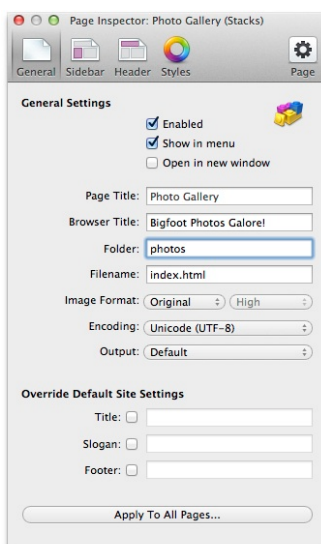
bigfootsupersite.com/photos **awesome! no cruft!**

nimblehost.com/store/themes/atlas.html **blegh, more cruft**

nimblehost.com/store/themes/atlas **whew, better!**

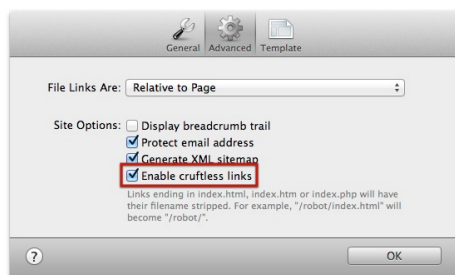
So now you're probably wondering how to make cruftless links in RapidWeaver. Fortunately, it's really easy:

1. First, you'll need to open the Page Inspector and access the General tab.
2. Change the folder to be descriptive and match the content of the page. In our bigfoot example above, the folder would be photos. (**Edit:** this was previously Step 3, but as Markus pointed out in the comments below, a better workflow is to change the folder first, before changing the file name.)
3. Change the filename to index.html (or index.php or whatever file extension you need, just be sure the file name is "index").
4. Repeat Steps 2 and 3 above for each page in your site.
5. Open the Site Setup dialog box (select "Show Site Setup" from the RW "Site" menu).
6. Select the Advanced tab, and check the "Enable cruftless links" checkbox.
7. Re-publish your site.

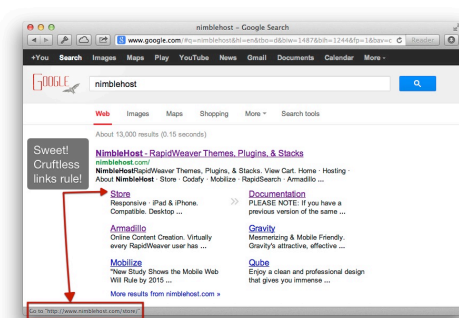


That's it!

Update: As Steve in the comments mentioned, links may appear to not work if you export your site to a local folder and preview in a browser. This is not a problem, however, as the links will work when you've uploaded the pages to your website.



Once you've done this, you won't have to worry about changing the file name of your pages and how that might affect your SEO rankings. The reason for this is that search engines will store the cruftless link to your site in their search index.



The final question we get asked at this point is, "But what if my site is already listed with search engines using a blasted crufty link? What to do?" There's a solution to that as well, that won't affect your search rankings, and will make sure site visitors see the correct page every time...and we'll cover that in our next post!

{ 44 comments... [add one](#) }

Lorelei November 9, 2012, 1:44 am



Really great post you guys. Thanks for sharing the information. I'll make good use of it. I'm looking forward to part deux! Hurry 😊

LINK

Filippo November 9, 2012, 2:13 am

Nice post! But I think that changing the name of the page you can be more descriptive and have more influence on the ranking, for example <http://www.joemusicstore.com/fender-stratocaster-deluxe.html> (in terms of SEO) is better than <http://www.joemusicstore.com/fender/>



LINK

Jonathan November 9, 2012, 2:21 am



I understand your perspective. The question then comes up, what happens to your rankings when you need to change `fender-stratocaster-deluxe.html` so that it uses a `.php` (or `.jsp/asp/cfm/etc`) file extension? It would be less work to instead change the folder name to `fender-stratocaster-deluxe` and leave the page name as `index`. That way you still get the benefits of a page URL that uses a highly targeted keyword, without the hassle of worrying about how future file name changes affect your search rankings.

LINK

Neil Taylor November 9, 2012, 2:24 am



Thanks Jonathan,
I have implimented your advice on some of my websites and look forward to part two coming soon...
Neil Taylor

LINK

Kathy November 9, 2012, 2:32 am



Great explanation, very clear and helpful... and something I had wondered about. Thank you!

LINK

Michael Treadway November 9, 2012, 2:45 am



does rapid weaver use a php language in the blog platform?
Why would someone be worried about changing the file extension suddenly anyway?
Michael

LINK

Jonathan November 9, 2012, 2:58 am



Hi Michael, RapidWeaver's blog page does have the option to use a "Dynamic PHP Sidebar" (the option is located in the Page Inspector for the RW Blog page type). By default RW uses a .html file extension when creating pages, but if you later change your RW Blog to use this PHP sidebar, the file extension will change to .php as a result. This is just one such example where using cruftless links help future-proof your site when you need to make changes like this.

Hope this helps.

LINK

Gianluigi November 9, 2012, 6:35 am



Hi Jonathan, very nice explanation.

However, in RapidWeaver, "enable cruftless links" works only for the main page (index) and NOT for the others pages. (try it!)

[/Volumes/data/giangi/Desktop/Schermata 2012-11-09 alle 07.28.53.png](#)

LINK

Gianluigi November 9, 2012, 7:10 am



Don't you think, as Filippo said, for secondary pages, to change the default filename (...../index.xxxx) with a more "SEO friendly" one and, if you need to change the extension, to use a redirect 301?

LINK

Markus Frieauff November 9, 2012, 7:23 am



Thanks for the good article, Jonathan. Two remarks:

1. one on your suggestion how to change file names: it is easier to FIRST take step 3 (rename your folder or name your folder at all) and THEN step 2 (rename the page to index.html or index.php). Because if you already have several pages sitting on the root level (I know many RW do that, and in some way it makes sense to keep urls short) RW will protest against naming a second file "index" since there is one already.

2. a more general coment: this whole issue including the “fender-stratocaster-deluxe”-case (great guitar by the way, I owned one) comes down to site structure. And I think it is good practice to put each page in its own folder. This also helps navigating around in ftp. Since RW doesn’t delete anything from the server sometimes you need to do that manually if you’ve deleted pages. If they’re all in their own folder, you don’t need to worry, just delete the folder. I think that site structure advice needs to be spread further in the RW world.

LINK

gideon November 9, 2012, 12:35 pm



Part 2 please. Great stuff as usual. Thank you

LINK

Brad Kellam November 9, 2012, 3:00 pm



I was just wondering why you are using a wordpress (the wordpress Admin below gave it away) blog and not something from rapidweaver, or that you created?

LINK

Juan November 9, 2012, 4:01 pm



Thanks for the post, very clear and easy to follow. Now I can rid of the number folders in my RW pages!

Juan

LINK

Jonathan November 9, 2012, 6:42 pm



Hi Brad,

Great question. 😊 We are indeed using WordPress, and do have a product (Armadillo) which is designed to take the place of WordPress for RapidWeaver users. We’re working on an tool that can import WordPress data into Armadillo, but it is not yet ready to be tested. Once the tool can reliably import a WordPress site, we’ll be switching to Armadillo for our own blog. 😊

Best,

Jonathan
NimbleHost.com

LINK

Jonathan November 9, 2012, 6:47 pm



Hi Gianluigi,

The entire NimbleHost site (excluding this blog) is built in RW and enables cruftless links. Each page file name is called `index.html` or `index.php` with a specific folder name. If you visit every single page in our site, even pages that are several layers deep in the hierarchy, you'll find that all the links and page URLs are cruftless. The key, of course, is to make sure all the folder names for your pages are unique and don't conflict with others, and that each page file name is called `index.ext`.

Hope this helps add some clarification.

LINK

Jonathan November 9, 2012, 6:48 pm



I'll touch on 301 redirects in part two. 😊 For the large majority of RW users, messing with a `.htaccess` file is something they don't want to do, or do as little as possible.

LINK

Jonathan November 9, 2012, 6:52 pm



Great points, Markus. I'll adjust the post accordingly.

Likewise, structure does play a key role. Regarding our `fender-stratocaster-deluxe` example, I personally think a better site structure would be `fender/stratocaster-deluxe` as you can then have other pages representing additional fender models as sub-pages, e.g. `fender/jazzmaster`, `fender/mustang`, etc.

LINK

Gianluigi November 11, 2012, 11:18 am

It 's true, thanks!



LINK

Vlado November 12, 2012, 3:19 am



Hi Jonathan,

You have a way of making the learning process so much easier – for this I am grateful.

Many thanks !!!

Vlado

LINK

Karn Broad November 13, 2012, 10:03 am



You will want to be careful using a / in a folder dialogue in RapidWeaver if you are using it's built in sitemap.xml generator, you'll get errors in it. Using the folder name for the descriptive part as described avoids this current issue too.

Loghound.com's Sitemap Plus doesn't have an issue with a / at the front of the Folder dialogue.

Karn.

LINK

Tina November 28, 2012, 12:33 am



It's nice with all the tips and tricks on videos. But I think it's fare more important you make video tutorials about your stacks and plugins. I would like to see some videos about using the plugin Armadrillo. How to design a website from the beginning using Armadrillo. This would be a great service to people whom buy your stuff.

I really hope you'll consider.

Best Tina

LINK

Jonathan December 6, 2012, 4:47 am



Thanks for the feedback, Tina. I assume you're asking for a more in-depth version of the video we've created here:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=It6aRggpOkI&feature=plcp>

Is that correct?

LINK

Steve February 25, 2013, 2:35 pm



I've just been trying this but it seems to make a mess of my navigation – sub menu's items don't work now!

When I export the site, sub menu items are now inside of a folder that is the main menu item and the links seem to be broken??

I'm working with Blueball Freestack theme... I hope there's an easy fix?

Steve

LINK

Jonathan February 25, 2013, 5:40 pm



Hi Steve,

With cruftless links, it's correct (in the case of RapidWeaver) for each page to have its own folder, and for sub-menu items to be inside the folder of a parent items (they are, after all, sub-items of that page).

You mention links seem broken, could you provide more details and a link to the site in question?

LINK

Steve February 26, 2013, 8:37 am



OK my bad!

I was testing it locally on an export to my Mac and the menu navigation links didn't work. I've now published to a web host and it works fine.

Might be worth a mention that you need to publish on-line to get it to work.

Many thanks for your help and the tip!

LINK

Jonathan February 26, 2013, 7:10 pm



Glad to help, and thanks for the feedback. I'll update the post accordingly.

LINK

Uschi Erlewein February 28, 2013, 12:27 pm



Hi Jonathan,

sorry its me again! I did in the meantime change all filenames to .index.html, did delete all pages on the server, did upload all files, did empty the cache of webbrowser: strange enough some parts of the website show crufty-links (<http://www.uschi-erlewein.de/termine/index.html>), some cruftless-links (<http://www.uschi-erlewein.de/repertoire/mongolei/>).

I did in .htaccess: Redirect permanent to " /examplefilename/" it redirects but to the crufty-links.

I thought maybe my RW-project is not working/saving anymore, so I created a new project, enabled cruftless links before I added all pages, uploaded those files: nothing changed.

There are still some few files I did not know what to do with:

/error404.html

/sitemap.html

if i put them into a file and name the page .index.html then i get an error 403

I really don't understand whats happening and have no idea what else I could do. So you are my emergency ambulance...

Thanks for your help

Uschi

LINK

Jonathan March 2, 2013, 5:37 pm



Hi Uschi,

It looks like the pages that include the file name (like <http://www.uschi->

erlewein.de/termine/index.html) actually have a file name of "index.html " <-- note the empty space at the very end, after the "l" in "html". This empty space shows up in your browser's URL bar as "%20". I'd suggest making sure there are no empty spaces before and after the filename for all the pages in your site, then re-publish to see if that fixes things.

LINK

Uschi Erlewein March 3, 2013, 5:45 pm



Hi Jonathan,

I realize I still have to learn alot about the subtleties of RW. You shared another "lesser known RE secret" Thanks so much! The empty space was the issue! Now the /index.html cruft disappeared.

Only the blog-pages still keep the .php ending

for example: (<http://www.uschi-erlewein.de/erzaehlblog/files/maerchen-symbolle.php>). Did I miss another little thing?

LINK

Jonathan March 3, 2013, 10:26 pm



The blog-pages for each individual post are generated by RapidWeaver directly, and to the best of my knowledge, are all stored in a single folder. As such, they can't all be named "index.html", so RW names each one uniquely. As such, those individual post pages (such as the example you provide) cannot be cruftless links.

However, your main blog page (<http://www.uschi-erlewein.de/erzaehlblog/>) is a cruftless link, and that is the most important part. 😊

Hope this helps.

LINK

Uschi Erlewein March 4, 2013, 3:06 am



YES, you helped me so much! Thank you!!!

Looking forward to your next posts,

you are my RW-hero 😊

Uschi

LINK

Gavin March 15, 2013, 7:39 am



Hi Jonathan, I've implemented this and have had the confusing experience of some of my pages working as planned. But other's going to an 'index' type text page with no html display. When I remove cruftless links and republish then all works well. I'm very confused! These one's don't work:

<http://www.earthprobiotic.com/Media/>

<http://www.earthprobiotic.com/TC/>

Best,

Gavin

LINK

Jonathan March 15, 2013, 1:58 pm



Hi Gavin,

I would need access to your hosting account to know for sure, but my guess is that there is a .htaccess file, or some other server setting which is preventing the "index.html" file from being automatically loaded by web browsers.

In fact, when I visit pages on your site that use a "index.php" file, those type of cruftless links are loaded just fine – only "index.html" pages are not. As such, this is most likely a setting in your hosting account that needs to be changed.

Hope this helps.

LINK

Joe Stephens April 14, 2013, 4:08 pm



Hi sorry im novice at this stuff why cant i add a folder to the index.html file that is my home page?

LINK

Jonathan April 14, 2013, 10:29 pm



Hi Joe, to make sure I understand your question – why are you trying to add a folder to your home page?

LINK

Jessica May 23, 2015, 8:10 am



What if you have pages with subpages and you want to use crustless links? How do you name a page within a page in just the folder? Can you use a forward slash (/) in folder names with dashes or does that hurt SEO?

For example: website is called <http://www.vehicles.com>

Page 3 is titled “Cars”. Inside of “Cars” I have a subpage called “American Cars” and inside “American Cars” I have another subpage called “Ford Cars”.

How would that look?

- 1) <http://www.vehicles.com/cars>
- 2) <http://www.vehicles.com/cars/american-cars>
- 3) <http://www.vehicles.com/cars/american-cars/ford-cars>

Would all 3 separate pages look like that using cruftless links?

So for example 3, would I type in the folder like this below?:

/cars/american-cars/ford-cars

Thanks!

LINK

Jonathan May 23, 2015, 11:01 pm



Essentially, yes, they’d look as you describe – however, I’d get rid of the “-cars” portion of “american-cars” and “ford-cars”. It’s typically understood that when you see something like `vehicles.com/cars/american/ford` that the “american” and “ford” portions are also referring to cars. No need to include that again in the sub-pages. 😊

LINK

Len Pritchard October 27, 2015, 1:09 pm



I’m being advised by a google guru not to include index.html in URL. Seems to contradict this advice – any idea why?

LINK

Jonathan October 27, 2015, 2:24 pm



Actually, this lines up exactly with what Google suggests. By changing filenames to “index.html” or “index.php”, etc., you can then exclude them from your links – that’s exactly what a cruftless link is, a URL with no ending filename (no cruft, hence “cruftless”).

However, you won’t be able to exclude that filename portion (index.html) from the URL as Google (and we) suggests, unless the filename is `index.ext`.

LINK

Len Pritchard October 28, 2015, 5:53 am



Is there not an issue with duplicate urls with the same content as `/index.html` become the same as `/'nothing'`?

LINK

Jonathan October 29, 2015, 2:56 am



Although you can indeed access the same page via different URLs, as you mention, this isn’t a “problem” because:

- search engines know they are the same page
- you can use `.htaccess` rewrite rules to target people trying to access one URL (such as the “index.html” version) and redirect them to the cruftless URL, as mentioned in our follow-up post

LINK

Len Pritchard October 29, 2015, 6:03 am



Many thanks – I shall get cracking on my `.htaccess` file! I’m sure the dilution is minimal but probably worth doing

LINK

Steve September 20, 2016, 12:32 pm



I can see this is an old post so assume this is now not a valid technique?

LINK

Jonathan September 23, 2016, 9:42 pm



Though the interface in RW itself may change over time, the actual technique of using cruftless links to improve SEO (for any site) is still valid, and will likely remain so for the foreseeable future. 😊

LINK

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