

## **SA Ethics debate spills into International Spotlight**

**By Jim Hedger, StepForth News Editor, [StepForth Placement Inc.](#)**

An ethical SEO dust-up, which started in the South African media last Friday, has spilled over into the international SEO media. Cape Town ISP, [Tiscali SA](#) is defending itself after issuing a press release touting new, automated SEO services it offers clients under the name, E-Traffic.

In the [press release](#), Tiscali states it uses hidden text and doorway pages, with the goal of getting clients' websites, "right in the face of active online consumers."

One line of the release states, "Doorway pages are created that target specific search engines to improve search engine rankings." Others contain words such as "hidden text", making obvious implications of keyword stuffing, duplicate content and other violations of common search engine Terms of Service agreements.

The language used in the release outraged local SEOs from firms such as Quirk, Incubeta and Seoza, who fear their burgeoning industry will be called into disrepute if a major South African player starts spamming the search engines with SEO practices considered unethical by most of the sector. Tiscali's press statement also raised eyebrows at well known South African search engine [Ananzi](#) with company spokesperson [Mark Buwalda](#) being quoted as saying, "While we encourage people to add relevant meta tags and titles to their pages in order to get them noticed, manipulation and playing games does not help one's clients."

In it's defense, Tiscali has stated that the term Doorway pages might be misunderstood. What they really meant to say was, "information pages", or "sub-pages". Julie-Anne Doyle, Tiscali's head of consumer products was quoted in the same article saying, "I think perhaps the term 'doorway pages' in the Tiscali context has been misunderstood, and would be better understood if it were called 'sub-pages'. These sub-pages of the Web site are completely and totally part of the Web site, describing the business and products that are being sold in a professional and honourable way, in no way endangering search engine rankings."

The controversy generated a lot of discussion in the past few days, so much that Tiscali's parent company, [M-Web](#) is thinking about retracting parts of the service. "We're still busy taking product decisions and working out what will stay and what will go," said Russell Dreisenstock, GM of M-Web's South African division.

Regardless of how anyone else feels about the definition of "ethics" in search engine marketing, this story is evidence the debate is likely to grow in importance as the industry moves ever forward into the mainstream world.