

Sidebar to Google, can you hear me?

by Michael C. Neel

The Worst Framework Bug You'll Ever Meet

After writing this article, I came across a nasty bug in `HttpContext.RewritePath`. The effect of the bug is all browsers will see your site without trouble, but major search engines will only see error pages. Like I said, it's a nasty bug.

When a browser makes a request to an ASP.NET site, the framework decides what level of HTML the browser can support. Most clicnets will end up using `HtmlTextWriter`, but search engine spiders that place "Mozilla/5.0" in the value of user-agent may get `Html32TextWriter` instead. `Html32TextWriter` has a problem with `HttpContext.RewritePath` that the standard `HtmlTextWriter` does not; when `rebaseClientPath` is set to false, the `Page.Form`'s action attribute will start with ".." and `Html32TextWriter` may throw the following exception: "Cannot use a leading .. to exit above the top directory."

While debugging my own site, I found I could avoid the bug by setting `cookieless="UseCookies"` in the `<forms>` portion of the `<authentication>` section in `Web.Config`. Another option is to set custom browser profiles for the affected search engines – which include Google, Yahoo, and Ask Jeeves.

What makes this bug especially nasty (aside from removing your site from Google) is that it is virtually impossible to catch unless you know how to look for it. Sander Gerz, who first isolated this bug, has an excellent post discussing the details and how to use Fiddler (<http://www.fiddlertool.com>) to test your site for it. Read his post at: <http://todotnet.com/archive/2006/07/01/7472.aspx>