

Meta Tags Optimization for Search Engines

Courtesy of [America Web Works, LLC](#)

Defining **Meta Tags** is much easier than explaining how they are used, and by which engines. The reason is very few engines clearly lay out what they do and do not look at, and how much emphasis they put on any one factor.

So, we'll start with the easy part!

Meta Tags are lines of HTML code embedded into web pages that are used by search engines to store information about your site. These "**tags**" contain keywords, descriptions, copyright information, site titles and more. They are among the numerous things that the search engines look for, when trying to evaluate a web site.

Meta Tags are **not** "required" when you're creating web pages. Unfortunately, many web site operators who don't use them are left wondering why the saying "If I build it they will come" didn't apply to their site.

There's also a few naysayers in the search engine optimization industry who claim that Meta Tags are useless. You can believe them if you like, but you would be wise not to.

While not technically "required", Meta Tags are essential.

If you simply create a web site and register the URL with the search engines, their spiders will visit your site, and attempt to index it. Each search engine operates slightly differently, and each one weighs different elements of a web site according to their own proprietary algorithms. For example, Altavista places an emphasis on the description tag and Inktomi states on their web site that;

Inktomi "(...) indexes both the full text of the Web page you submit as well as the meta-tags within the site's HTML."

Other search engines like Exactseek are true meta tag search engines which clearly state their policy:

"Your site will not be added if it does not have Title and Meta Description tags."

They also use the keywords tag.

Of course, not all search engines work this way. Some place their emphasis on content. The search engines have over 100 individual factors they look at when reviewing a web site. Some of these factors deal with page structure. They check to see that all the 't's are crossed, and the 'i's dotted. They note sites that have omitted basic steps, like missing tags.

One reason so many engines de-emphasized the meta-keyword tag had to do with spam. There was a time when 'search engine promotion specialists' would cram keywords tags full of irrelevant information. The web site would be selling garbage cans, but the keywords tags were chock full of irrelevant terms like "mp3" or "Britney Spears". They figured that if enough people visited their site, some would buy.

So today, to avoid and penalize this kind of abuse, some search engines don't specifically use the keywords tag as part of the scoring of a site, but they monitor the keywords to ensure they match the content in the site. The reasoning being that, if the tags are irrelevant, they must have an alternate purpose. Is it a spam site? When keywords tags are completely irrelevant to the content, some search engines, that don't specifically use keywords tags, will penalize that web site.

Even for those engines that have downplayed the value of Meta Tags, there are situations where Meta Tags gain considerably in importance, e.g. sites with rich graphics, but poor textual content.

Unfortunately, a picture is worth 1000 words to you and me, but zero to a search engine. If a site has poor textual content, the engines will be more dependent than ever on the Meta Tags to properly categorize it.

Even if you ensure you have completely relevant Meta Tags, some search engines will still ignore them. But better they ignore them, than they ignore your whole site because they suspect something is less than above board. Never hope that having Meta Tags will make the difference in all the search engines; nothing is a substitute for good content. But in cases where the engine depends on that content, it may be the only thing that does work for your site.

So How To Use The Meta Tags?

Meta tags should always be placed in the area of an HTML document. This starts just after the tag, and ends immediately before the tag. Here's how the most basic set should look:

Always make sure that your meta tags do not have any line breaks, otherwise the search engines will just see bad code and ignore them. You should also avoid use of capitals in your code (html5 standard) as well as repetition of terms within the keywords tag.

What Goes Into a Meta Tag?

For the Description tag: ; Many search engines will display this summary along with the title of your page in their search results. Keep this reasonably short, concise and to the point, but make sure that it's an appropriate reflection of your site content.

For the keyword tag;

Keywords represent the key terms that someone might enter into a search engine. Choose only relevant keywords. If the terms are going to appear in your keywords tag, they must appear in the content of your site, or be a synonym to a term on your site. Most search engines compare your meta content with what is actually on your page, and if it doesn't match, your web site can get penalized, and suffer in search results.

for the Robots tag ;Many web pages have this tag wrong. An example of the wrong usage is content="index, follow, all" - wrong because some spiders can't handle spaces between the words in the tag or the word "all". Most engines by default assume that you want a web page to be indexed and links followed, so using the wrong syntax can actually result in the spider coming to the wrong conclusion and penalizing, or worse, ignoring the page outright. If by chance you do not want your links followed, or the page not indexed, then you would substitute "noindex" and or "nofollow" into the tag.

With the Internet growing at a rate of over 8,000,000 new pages per day, and the search engines adding a fraction of that number, Meta Tags are a common standard which can reasonably ensure a measure of proper categorization for a web site. So, always ensure that you cover all the bases, and use completely relevant terms in properly structured Meta Tags. Using tags properly will pay dividends in the short and long term. After all, using them properly only helps the search engines, which means they will send you more qualified traffic - customers.

If you are familiar with **Search Engine Optimization** techniques, it is most likely that you must have already come across a lot of information on Meta Tags. In this article, we simply talk about what Meta Tags are their importance, the important Meta Tags and useful tips on how to optimize your Meta Tags for a better ranking with the search engines.

So, what are Meta Tags really?

Meta Tags are the information inserted in the **<head>** area of the HTML code of your web pages, where apart from the Title Tag, other information inserted is not visible to the person surfing your web page but is intended for the search engine crawlers.

Meta Tags are included so that the search engines are able to list your site in their indexes more accurately. A typical Meta Tag would look as given below. Here is what this page contains; you can see this if you click on the view "Page source" from your browser menu.

```
<HEAD>  
  
<TITLE>Creating Successful meta tags, list of all meta tags, title tag limit, href tag, meta tag analysis</TITLE>
```

```
<meta name="description" content="Successful Meta tags: What are meta tags? Meta tag analysis, list of all meta tags, title tag limit, creating meta tags, background meta tags. This article covers the most important aspects of meta tags in relation to website optimization or SEO. ">
```

```
<meta name="keywords" content="meta tags, meta tag refresh, meta tag optimization, meta tag analysis, meta tag keywords, what are meta tags, successful meta tags, using meta tags, html meta tags, common meta tags, author meta tag, alt tags, list of all meta tags, meta tags html, meta tag description, about meta tags">
```

```
</HEAD>
```

Using Meta Tags in HTML is not necessary while making your web pages.

There are many websites that don't feel the requirement to use Meta Tags at all. In short Meta information is used to communicate information to the search engine crawlers that a human visitor may not be concerned with. Infoseek and AltaVista were the first major crawler based search engines to support Meta keywords Tag in 1996. Inktomi and Lycos too followed thereafter.

Why are Meta Tags used?

Meta Tags were originally designed to provide webmasters with a way to help search engines know what their site was about. This in turn helped the search engines decide how to rank the sites in their search results. Making Meta Tags is a simple process. As the competition increased, webmasters started manipulating this tool through spamming of keywords.

In turn most search engines withdrew their support to Meta keywords Tag, which included Lycos and AltaVista. From being considered as one of the most reliable and important tool, Meta Tags are now often abused. In the present day scenario a vital feature that the Meta Tags provide to the websites is the ability to control, to a certain extent, how some search engines describe its web pages. Apart from this, Meta Tags also offer the ability to specify that a certain website page should not be indexed.

Using Meta Tags, however, provides no guarantee that your website page would rank highly in the search engine rankings. Due to the rampant abuse and manipulation of the Meta keywords Tag by webmasters, most search engines don't support it anymore.

Types of Meta Tags

The more important Meta Tags are discussed below in detail. A list of several more Meta Tags is given at the end of this article.

The Title Tag

The Title Tag is not a Meta Tag. However, since it's a very important Tag, we thought it necessary to discuss it here. The Title Tag is an HTML code that shows the words that appear at the top title bar of your browser. The Title Tag is not displayed anywhere else on the page. It is these words or phrase that appear as the title of your page in the hyperlink listings on the search engine results.

The users in-turn click on this hyperlink to go to your website from Search Engine Results Page (SERP). Therefore, the significance of the Title Tag is evident as all search engines use the Title Tag to gather information about your site.

Syntax for the Title Tag is:

```
<HEAD> <TITLE>Creating Successful meta tags, list of all meta tags, title tag limit, href tag, meta tag analysis</TITLE> </HEAD>
```

Useful Tips for Writing the Title Tag

The Title Tag plays a vital role in determining your site's search engine rankings.

One needs to pay attention to the words that appear in your Title Tag and the order in which they appear. As the tag suggests, Title Tag announces the summary of the content appearing on the page. Think of it as a crisply worded sales phrase and include your most relevant and specific keywords or key phrases in the Title Tag describing the content of the page.

You could put the product or service you are offering in the Title Tag, instead of your firm or company's name. For example, if you have a site offering kitchen appliances, instead of having a title like "www.cooking.com", you could have a specific keyword rich Title Tag like "Bar Blenders: Waring Kitchenaid Hamilton beach Cuisinart bar blenders and blender". This title would cover several keyword phrases like- bar blenders, bar blender, Waring bar blenders, Kitchenaid bar blenders, Hamilton Beach bar blenders, Cuisinart bar blenders, blender etc.

Most users search for specific products and services, not company names. If you do wish to include the site name, then you can add it at the end of the Title Tag. Having your most important keyword phrases towards the beginning of the Title Tag helps display your title in bold in the SERP (search engines results page). Title Tags are also the text that gets captured when users bookmark your page.

Google usually reads about 90 characters of your Title Tag. So, leverage this length to cover prominent keywords relevant to the page. A common mistake webmasters make is to have the same Title Tag throughout the site. You must leverage different Title Tags for each page and customizing it depending on the content theme of each page. Also read our detailed article on Title Tag Optimization.

The Meta Description Tag

The Meta Description Tag is an HTML code that allows you to give a short and concise summary of your web page content. The words placed in this Meta Tag, are often used in the SERP, just below the Title Tag as a brief description of your page. In the Search Engine Results Pages, after reading the Title of the page, a user goes through the description of the page and decides whether she wants to go to your site or not. It is therefore important that your Meta Description Tag is nicely composed describing your page offering while enticing the user to click on your listing.

Syntax for Meta Description Tag is:

```
<HEAD> <meta name="description" content="Successful Meta tags: What are meta tags? Meta tag analysis, list of all meta tags, title tag limit, creating meta tags, background meta tags. This article covers the most important aspects of meta tags in relation to website optimization or SEO."> </HEAD>
```

Useful Tips for Writing Meta Description Tag

In case you have not provided any Meta Description Tag to your web page, the search engines try to make one for you, often using the first few words of your web page or a text selection where the keyword phrases searched by the users appear. If the Search Engine makes up a description by picking up text from your page, it is not necessary that the generated description would do justice to your web page.

The Meta Description Tag should be written in such a way that it interests the user, thus tempting her to click on the link to your site and visit your web page.

The Meta Description Tag needs to be kept **brief yet informative**. About **25-30 words description** should do fine. Keywords and key phrases should be included in the Meta Description Tag, though care should be taken not to repeat them too often. Like the Title Tag, the Meta Description Tag should be different

and customized for each page depending on the content theme of each page. For more information on Meta Description Tag, read our other article on Meta Description Tag Optimization.

The Meta Keywords Tag

Most search engines do not read the Meta Keywords Tag anymore. It is okay to ignore the Meta Keywords Tags. However, if you feel more comfortable using it, you can have about 15 important non-repetitive keywords in this Tag, separated by commas.

Syntax for Meta Keywords Tag is:

```
<HEAD> <META name="keywords" content="Keyword phrases that describe your web page"> </HEAD>
```

Meta Robots Tag

The Meta Robots Tag gives you the ability to specify whether search engines should index that page or follow the links appearing on that page. However, there is no need for using Meta Robots tag if one is already using detailed robots.txt file to block any specific indexing. Read our article on Working with the robots.txt file.

The various commands used under Meta Robots Tag are:

Index: allows the spider to index that page.

Noindex: instructs the spider not to index the page.

Follow: instructs the spider to follow the links from that page and index them.

Nofollow: instructs the spider not to follow links from that page for indexing.

```
<HEAD> <meta name="robots" content="index, follow"> <meta name="robots" content="noindex, follow">  
<meta name="robots" content="index, nofollow"> <meta name="robots" content="noindex, nofollow">  
</HEAD>
```

Important Note: Use only one of the above given commands.

If you have not specified any Meta Robots Tag on a page, by default, the spiders understand that the page and all the links appearing on that page are open for indexing. Therefore, it makes more sense to use this Meta Tag in case you don't want certain parts of your web page indexed.

Apart from these popular Meta Tags, there are few more Tags that are not so popular. These are:

Meta Refresh Tag

The Meta Refresh Tag is used to redirect a visitor from one page to another or refresh the same page in a specified time. Same page refresh comes in use when the page content is changing very quickly, for example if there is a running score of a game or stock prices updates happening on that page. When inserted into an HTML document, it causes the user's browser to load the same or a new web page after a specified number of seconds.

This Meta Tag has been manipulated and is sometimes abused as a tool to "bait and switch" a user from a doorway page.

To refresh the current page:

```
<HEAD> <meta http-equiv="refresh" content="60"> </HEAD>
```

Content = "60" denotes refresh after 60 seconds

To redirect to another page:

```
<HEAD> <meta http-equiv="refresh" content="2;url=http://www.seorank.com/"> </HEAD>
```

Using a Meta Refresh Tag to redirect to another page is likely to get it dropped from search engines, since this method is tagged as a doorway page in search engine algorithms. Unless you have a compelling reason to use Meta Refresh Tag, do not use it.

Meta Author Tag

The Meta Author Tag identifies the author of a particular web page. Though not highly supported, its format usually includes the name, e-mail address of the Webmaster, name of the company or the Internet address.

```
<META name="Author" content="Author Information">
```

Meta Distribution Tag

The Distribution Meta Tag identifies the level of distribution of your web page and how it should be further classified in context to the World Wide Web. The three forms of distribution supported by this Tag are:

‘Global’ specifies that your web page is for mass distribution.

‘Local’ lets you specify that your document is for local distribution only.

‘Internal Use or IU’ specifies that your document is not intended for public distribution.

Syntax for different Meta Distribution Tags: (Use only one of the following)

```
<HEAD> <META name="Distribution" content="Global"> <META name="Distribution" content="Local">  
<META name="Distribution" content="IU"> </HEAD>
```

Meta Revisit Tag

Historically, the Meta Revisit Tag was believed to specify how often a search engine should visit a site for re-indexing. Although not proven, webmasters could indicate the frequency of how often their content changes and is ready for a re-index by search engines. These days, much as one would like to, one cannot command the re-visit frequency of any search engine, unless you go the PFI route.

```
<HEAD> <META name="Revisit-After" content="X Days"> </HEAD> Note: X indicates the number
```

List of other Meta Tags

Abstract Meta Tag: gives an overview of the entire web page in a sentence.

```
<HEAD> <META name="Abstract" content="Abstract phrase"> </HEAD>
```

Copyright Meta Tag: gives copyright information about your page, which you wish to disclose.

```
<HEAD> <META name="Copyright" content="Copyright Statement"> </HEAD>
```

Expires Meta Tag: tells the search engines when the content on your web site would expire.

<HEAD> <META name="Expires" content="Mon, 22 Jan 2004 17:45:05 GMT"> </HEAD>

Language Meta Tag: defines the language used on your web page.

<HEAD> <META HTTP-EQUIV="Content-Language" content="EN"> </HEAD>

Ratings Meta Tag: tells the search engines if your site is for general, restricted or adult audiences.

<HEAD> <META name= "Rating" content= "General"> </HEAD>

As you may evidently now know, Meta Tags are certainly NOT the "end all". They DO have their place and should be seriously considered just another arrow to be tucked into your marketing quiver.

To your great success!

Happy Marketing!



Tony Marino
Founder, CEO
America Web Works, LLC

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