

META TAGS

Optimising Your Website for Internet Search
Engines

(Google, Yahoo!, MSN, AltaVista, AOL, Alltheweb, Fast, GigaBlast, Netscape, Snap, WISEnut And
Others)

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Contents

Introduction	1
What Are Meta Tags	3
What does a Meta Tag look like?	5
Required Attributes	7
Optional Attributes	7
Connects the content attribute to an HTTP Header	7
Standard Attributes	7
The Title Tag	8
How Do Search Engines Use This Tag	8
Meta Description Tag	10
How to use this Meta Tag	10
Meta Abstract Tag	12
How to use this Meta Tag	12
How Search Engines Use This Meta Tag	12
Meta Author Tag	14
How to use this Meta Tag	14
How Search Engines Use This Meta Tag	14
Meta Copyright Tag	16
How to use this Meta Tag	16
How Search Engines Use This Meta Tag	16
Meta Distribution Meta Tag	18
How to use this Meta Tag	18
How Search Engines Use This Meta Tag	18
Meta Revisit-After Tag	20
How to use this Meta Tag	20
How Search Engines Use This Meta Tag	20
Meta Expires Tag	22
How to use this Meta Tag	22
HTTP Header:	22
Meta Content-Language Tag	24
How to use this Meta Tag	24
HTTP Header:	25
How Search Engines Use This Meta Tag	25
Meta Refresh Tag	27
How to use this Meta Tag	27
HTTP Header	27
How Search Engines Use This Meta Tag	27

Meta Page-Enter, Meta Page-Exit, Meta Site-Enter, Meta Site-Exit Tags	29
How to use this Meta Tag	29
HTTP Header	29
Meta Googlebot Tag	30
How to use this Meta Tag	30
HTTP Header	30
Meta Content-Disposition Tag	32
How to use this Meta Tag	32
HTTP Header	32
Meta Imagetoolbar Tag	35
How to use this Meta Tag	35
HTTP Header	35
Meta Pragma Tag	36
How to use this Meta Tag	36
HTTP Header	36
Meta Content-Type Tag	37
How to use this Meta Tag	37
HTTP Header	37
Meta Content-Script-Type Tag	38
How to use this Meta Tag	38
HTTP Header	38
List of Mimetypes	38
Meta Content-Style-Type Tag	40
How to use this Meta Tag	40
HTTP Header	40
Meta Default-Style Tag	41
How to use this Meta Tag	41
HTTP Header	41
Meta Window-target Tag	42
How to use this Meta Tag	42
HTTP Header	42
Meta Ext-Cache Tag	43
How to use this Meta Tag	43
HTTP Header	43
Set-Cookie Tag	44
How to use this Meta Tag	44
HTTP Header	44
Meta Cache-Control Tag	45

How to use this Meta Tag _____	45
HTTP Header _____	45
Meta Vary Tag _____	46
How to use this Meta Tag _____	46
HTTP Header _____	46
Meta PICS-Label Tag _____	47
Category: Multiculturalism _____	47
Category: Educational Content _____	47
Category: Environmental Awareness _____	47
Category: Tolerance _____	48
Category: Violence _____	48
Category: Sex _____	49
Category: Profanity _____	49
Category: Safety _____	49
Category: Canadian Content _____	50
Category: Commercial Content _____	50
Category: Gambling _____	50
How to use this Meta Tag _____	51
HTTP Header _____	51
Meta Msthemecopmpatible Tag _____	53
How to use this Meta Tag _____	53
Meta No-Email-Collection Tag _____	55
How to use this Meta Tag _____	55
Meta Robots Tag _____	57
How to use this Meta Tag _____	57
Using the Robots.txt convention _____	58
How Search Engines Use This Meta Tag _____	61
The Meta Keywords Tag _____	62
How to use this Meta Tag _____	62
Meta Rating Tag _____	64
How to use this Meta Tag _____	64
How Search Engines Use This Meta Tag _____	64
Meta Resource-Type Tag _____	65
How to use this Meta Tag _____	65
HTTP Header _____	65
Other Meta Tags _____	66
Dublin Core _____	66
How to use this Meta Tag _____	67
Miscellaneous _____	69
Meta Version Tag _____	69

Meta Generator Tag _____	69
Meta Presdate Tag _____	69
Meta Template Tag _____	70
Meta Operator Tag _____	70
Meta Creation_Date Tag _____	70
Meta Host Tag _____	70
Meta Host-Admin Tag _____	70
Meta Classification Tag _____	71
Meta Document-Type Tag _____	71
Meta Document-Rating Tag _____	71
Meta Document-Distribution, document-class Tag _____	71
Meta Subject Tag _____	71
Meta Build Tag _____	72
Meta Location Tag _____	72
Meta Random Text Tags _____	72
<i>Conclusion</i> _____	73
<i>Appendix 1</i> _____	76
Useful Websites _____	76
<i>A Dictionary of HTML META Tags</i> _____	76
<i>Appendix 2</i> _____	77
HTML 4.01 / XHTML 1.0 Reference _____	77
<i>Other Works by the Author</i> _____	80
<i>ABOUT THE AUTHOR</i> _____	83

Introduction

Buying a website is only the start of finding success on the internet. Next you have to be found by web users. Being found on Google, Yahoo!, MSN, AltaVista, AOL, Alltheweb, Fast, GigaBlast, Netscape, Snap, WISEnut and thousands of other search engines is the next major hurdle you have to climb. Whilst offline advertising can help, it can be very expensive and depending on your website, this may be too localized for a global market.

You could use online advertising. Again this is useful and effective if carefully planned, however it can be time consuming and also expensive. There are other avenues such as blogs, press releases, affiliation, banner exchange and link exchange to name but a few. All these methods have their place in your overall marketing plan however, before you even start all that, you need to optimize your website so that web users searching through search engines like Google, Yahoo!, MSN, AltaVista, AOL, Alltheweb, Fast, GigaBlast, Netscape, Snap, WISEnut and thousands of smaller search engines, can quickly find you. This means optimizing your website so that it will be found on the first search results page and preferably in the top ten highest ranking results.

The search engine is the most popular way that web users find information online. The term for getting a site more visible on the internet through search engines is called Search Engine Optimization (SEO). SEO is the means by which you make your website more visible to the outside world. The start of any serious SEO project is internal website optimization. By first optimizing your websites title, headings, Meta Tags, other tags (links, images, files etc), and the actual page content text, you will be able to maximize the effectiveness of how search engines view and rank your websites' relevance to keyword searches.

This is where this book on Meta Tags comes into play. In the pages of this book you will learn all you need to know about Meta Tags. We will examine what Meta Tags are, what each tag does, and how

you can use them effectively to enhance your website ranking with search engines.

What Are Meta Tags

Your web pages have an underlying code that represents the entire webpage through a coded language. This coded language is called Hyper Text Markup Language (HTML or XHTML, an extended version which requires tags to be properly closed). HTML uses tags to represent everything you see on a webpage (see Appendix 2 in the appendices on page 77). There are some main tags we will now examine in order to better understand Meta Tags.

The first tag in most web pages is the HTML tag. This tag is represented with `<HTML>` and has to be closed at the end of your web page with `</HTML>`. The / represents an end to the tag name that follows it. In HTML, declared tags need to be closed with the / followed by the tag name.

You have to have `<HTML>` at the beginning of your website code. If you don't have `<HTML>` at the beginning of your webpage code, everything else you declare within the webpage code may appear as text in the browser.

The next tag is the Head tag. This is where we will concentrate the bulk of this book. The `<HEAD>` section specifies information about the website and webpage for search engines. Apart from the Title tag described next, information specified in the Head section will not be visibly displayed on your webpage when viewed through a web browser. We will look closely at all the tags that come under the head section. These tags specify declare information that helps search engines to index, rank, categorize, and cross-reference web pages. They also define character sets, author name, copyright information, page title, and keywords as well as whether the page should be revisited or cached by search engines.

The Title Tag tells the browser the page title. This is displayed on the title line of the browser. This should ideally be less than sixty Characters. Titles longer than this may not be fully displayed by some web browsers.

Special script code like JavaScript and other types of scripts can be specified with the `<SCRIPTS>` tag (see Appendix 2, in the appendices on page 77 for a full listing of all the available tags).

The next HTML section is the bulk of most web pages. It is the `<BODY>` section. This section contains all the text, tables, images, sound, forms etc.

So now you know the various sections of a HTML coded webpage, let us look at the original question we asked at the beginning of this section, “What are Meta Tags?” Meta Tags are optional tags containing information inserted under the `<HEAD>` section of your web pages. These are called Meta Tags because they are information that defines a tag rather than tags themselves. Apart from the Title tag, all tags specified under the `<HEAD>` section are Meta Tags. Meta Tags tell search engines how to handle, index rank and display your web pages. This information goes someway to help search engines rank your pages, and website.

Without using Meta Tags, if you only submit your web site to search engines your website would eventually be visited by the search engines’ spider programs or robots, which would proceed to index your pages. The way each of the search engines spider programs works differs slightly from search engine to search engine. For instance, some search engines like AltaVista will index everything from your web pages. However it will only generate a description from the first 250 characters. Therefore if your web pages do not start with a page description, AltaVista will continue to describe it with whatever you have at the beginning of your site instead. Useless descriptions like that say nothing about the content that a visitor may find on the site. It therefore is wise to include a page description as the first paragraph of each webpage. Therefore make sure that your opening paragraph is carefully written and it accurately reflects what the page contains.

What does a Meta Tag look like?

Not all search engines support Meta Tags. Excite for instance doesn't. However it is still prudent to use Meta Tags as many of the other major search engines do support them and you Meta Tags allow you to exert some level of control over how these search engines index and treat your site.

You can insert the Meta Tag element after the Title Tag; however you should always start with the HTML Meta Tag. The `<TITLE>` element can be declared within your HTML Meta Tag. There are two types of Meta Tag attributes. A Meta Tag declaration resembles either of the following:

```
<META HTTP-EQUIV="name" CONTENT="content">  
<META NAME="name" CONTENT="content">
```

META tags with an HTTP-EQUIV attribute control the action of browsers, and may be used to refine the information provided by the actual headers, thus they are equivalent to HTTP Headers. Meta Tags using this form should have an equivalent effect when specified as an HTTP Header, and in some servers may be translated to actual HTTP Headers automatically or by a pre-processing tool on the server.

HTTP-EQUIV META tags work with most browsers but may not work with all. They may not be understood by cache agents and proxies, therefore wherever possible, use the HTTP Headers instead. Wherever an HTTP-EQUIV META Tag is listed in this book, its associated HTTP Header will also be given.

In HTML, Meta Tag definitions do not need to be closed with `</>`, however you should not include any line breaks in your declaration of the Meta Tag as this can cause your webpage to be incorrectly read by the search engine spider programs.

The following are a few examples of Meta Tag declarations:

Examples

How to define web page keywords:

```
<meta name="keywords" content="Meta Tag, MetaTag, Meta  
Tags, MetaTags, Book, Books, MetaTag Book, MetaTag  
Books">
```

How to define a web page description:

```
<meta name="description" content="A book on MetaTags and  
using Meta Tags.">
```

How to set the last revision of your page:

```
<meta name="revised" content="MetaTags, 30/04/2007">
```

How to Refresh a page every 5 seconds:

```
<meta http-equiv="refresh" content="5">
```

Required Attributes

The following are required attributes for declaring Meta Tags.

DTD indicates in which document type the attribute is allowed.
S=Strict, T=Transitional, and F=Frameset.

Attribute	Value	Description	DTD
content	some_text	Defines meta information to be associated with http-equiv or name	STF

Optional Attributes

The following are optional attributes for declaring Meta Tags.

Attribute	Value	Description	DTD
http-equiv	content-type expires refresh set-cookie	Connects the content attribute to an HTTP Header	STF
name	author description keywords generator revised others	Connects the content attribute to a name	STF
scheme	some_text	Defines a format to be used to interpret the value of the content attribute	STF

Standard Attributes

The following are standard attributes for declaring Meta Tags.

dir, lang, xml:lang

The Title Tag

As you previously read, the HTML title tag is not a Meta Tag. It is a HTML tag and as such it could be defined outside the Head section and still function, however it is worth grouping it under the Head section. You should specify your website title within the `<TITLE>` and `</TITLE>` tags.

How Do Search Engines Use This Tag

Almost all search engines use the Title Tag for ranking purpose and most of them use it as a listing title for your webpage. Therefore it is critical that you make this title tag work hard for you.

Here is where your first bit of SEO comes in. Search engines such as Google use the information in the Title tag to determine the relevance of your site to keyword searches, therefore it is a good idea to make sure this information is as SEO friendly as possible and if possible, contains your webpage and site's main keywords.

Spend some time to select the best and most popular keywords for your website and webpage's content. Use a keyword suggestion tool to tunnel down into these keywords to find the most popular and relevant sub keywords. Then make up your title with these.

To create an SEO friendly title, use a keyword tool such as, http://www.iwebtool.com/keyword_suggestion. Keyword suggestion tools are ideal for finding the most popular keywords for your website. Simply input the main keyword and press the return key on your keyboard. You will be presented with suggestions of further keywords. Select the most relevant keyword in the highest ranking position and click on the link for that keyword. This will take you to a dead end or it will suggest further keywords. Continue this till you have four to six keywords. Then

make up your title with these. You can separate them with ‘|’ or ‘–’ or ‘,’. Remember to keep the title to less than sixty characters.

Any text you place within the `<TITLE>` and `</TITLE>` tags will be displayed on the title bar of the web browser the page is viewed on. Some web browsers append extra text to the title such as Microsoft Internet Explorer.

The following example shows how you can create a title from keywords.

Title Tag Example

meta tags
meta tags html
meta tags generator
meta tags google
meta tags keywords
meta tags in html
meta tags robots
meta tags tutorial
meta tags description
meta tags seo
meta tags analyzer

The above keywords could be used to create the following Title Tag for a Met Tag SEO website.

```
<TITLE> Meta Tags in HTML | Keywords and Description  
Generator | SEO Tutorial | Google Robots Analyzer |  
</TITLE>
```

Meta Description Tag

AltaVista and **InfoSeek** support this Meta Tag.

The Meta Description Tag defines a general description of what is contained within your webpage. Some search engines use this information, along with the Title Tag, to create a brief description of your webpage in their search results. The Meta Description Tag is particularly important if your document is a frameset, has extensive scripts at the top, or has very little text.

The Meta Description Tag allows you to influence the description of your page in the search engines that support the tag. Search engines that support Meta Tags will often display the Description Meta Tag along with your title in their results.

Google ignores the Meta Description Tag and instead will automatically generate its own description for web pages. Other search engines may support it partially. For instance, Teoma displays the first portion of the page's description using the Meta Description tag, then displays the pages rank in the search and then displays the remaining portion by drawing from the body of the page itself.

How to use this Meta Tag

META Name:	"Description"
General Usage:	<code><META name="Description" content="Your description"></code>

Your description text should go between the quotation marks after the "content=" portion of the Meta Description Tag. This should not be longer than 200 to 250 characters, as most of the search engines that use this Meta Tag will only index descriptions up to

this length. Generally however, only twenty words from your description will be displayed with search results, therefore make sure that the first ten to twenty words of your description contains a “hook”, to capture the search engine user’s attention. You can use the remainder of your description to further expand on your webpage’s purpose and content.

Whilst it may be worthwhile to use the Meta Description Tag for your pages for the degree of control it give you with various search engines, it can be time consuming creating effective descriptions for each page, therefore you may want to limit using the Meta Description Tag to only the critical and most popular and important pages on your site or you may wish to reuse Meta Descriptions for page with similar or identical content. This is especially useful if your site changes regularly, you add pages continuously to your site or if your site has a lot of pages.

Meta Description Tag Example

If your site sold accounting software and you offered a trial version through the site you could use the free offer as a hook in your Meta Description Tag.

Instead of starting your description with the following:

<META name="Description" content="A site that specializes in accounting software.">

You could instead start your description with the following:

<META name="Description" content="Download free accounting software here. ">

You will note that “Download” and “Free” are very popular search words on the internet.

Meta Abstract Tag

The Meta Abstract Tag can be used to define a brief abstraction of your website. This Meta Tag is often confused with the Meta Description Tag, however they are very different.

The Meta Abstract Tag is an abstraction or a brief summary of the Meta Description Tag. This Meta Tag is best kept short and brief. A single line description of the entire webpage is best. The Meta Abstract Tag is hardly used by search engines however for the search engines that read the first few lines of text of your web pages, it offers a useful.

How to use this Meta Tag

META Name:	"Abstract"
General Usage:	<code><META name="Abstract" content="Abstract phrase"></code>

How Search Engines Use This Meta Tag

This Meta Tag is almost useless for the purposes of raising your search engine ranking. The first reason for this is that hardly any search engines use it and secondly, the one that do generally use it for enhancing their archiving and indexing rather than for ranking purposes.

Although not many search engines look specifically for the Abstract Meta Tag, it adds a generalization of your webpage into your page's headers which search engines read often when archiving web pages.

The following is an example of how you can create a Meta Abstract Tag:

Meta Abstract Tag Example

If your site sold accounting software and you offered a trial version through the site you could use the free offer as a hook in your Meta Description Tag.

<META name="Abstract" content="Meta Abstract Tag description and example.">

Meta Author Tag

The Meta Author Tag declares who the author of the document is. This Meta Tag is unsupported by most search engines. It defines the name, email address of the author, company name or web address (URL).

How to use this Meta Tag

META Name:	"Author"
General Usage:	<i><META name="Author" content="Author Information"></i>

How Search Engines Use This Meta Tag

Again this Meta Tag will in no way aid your page's rise to the top of the search engine rankings, as not many search engines look specifically for the Meta Author Tag. However the Meta Author Tag clearly defines who the author is and/or the responsible party for making updates to the webpage. Therefore it is good practice to include it.

Most web authoring software will allow you to specify this Meta Tag, the software then automatically insert the tag into each page you create.

Meta Author Tag Example

Most people who use this Meta Tag simply use:

```
<META name="Author" content="Webmaster  
(webmaster@exampledomain.com).">
```

Note that webmaster@exampledomain.com used in the above example should be your email address and 'Webmaster' should be the title or name of you, or your webmaster.
