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## Making Meta Tags “Work”

All the time and money you’ve invested in your business web site seems to have been a big waste. It seems that the site is getting just a few visitors, and the search engines just don’t ever seem to rank your site very high - if at all - when your friends and business associates attempt to find it. Maybe part of your problem is lack of, or inefficient use of meta tags.

Meta tags are HTML tags or labels that define the contents of a web page. They come in three flavors - the Title Tag, the Meta Description Tag and the Meta Keywords Tag. These tags are used by search engines (along with page content) to index the page for folks performing web searches. The meta tag is integrated into the heading of the web page. You can also, by the way, use meta tags to prevent search engine indexing as well.

Let’s take a look at the meta tag types....

### The Title Tag

The Title Tag is just that - the title you supply for the web page. In HTML it would look like:

```
<HEAD>  
<TITLE>Home Office Reports</TITLE>
```

Many web page development applications, like Microsoft’s FrontPage, include non-HTML methods of editing or adding titles to make it very easy to supply a page title without HTML coding knowledge (in FrontPage, this is done through the Properties Menu listed under “File”). The Title Tag is displayed to visitors in the reverse bar of browsers, as the description of the page for visitors adding your page to their “Favorites” or “Bookmarks” lists and by search engines to list and rank your page. In fact the Title Tag is the single most important determining factor in how your page is listed/ranked in a search engine. The Title Tag is also displayed as the link to your site in the results of a search.

Therefore, it is clear that ensuring that every page on your site includes not only a Title Tag, but one that is clear and understandable is critical to attracting visitors to your web site.

### The Meta Description Tag

The Meta Description Tag is the next meta tag in the page heading. In HTML it would look something like:

```
<HEAD>  
<TITLE>Home Office Reports</TITLE>
```

---

```
<META name="description" content = "Ratings and Review of Technology-Based Products and Services for Home-based Businesses.">
```

The Meta Description Tag is the place where you can help the search engines better understand the content of your web page. You can make it as big as you like, however, only a small portion of the description will be displayed to searchers - usually around 200 characters. Some search engines don't use this tag at all (Google for example, which decides what the description is based on page content), however others may use all or part of the description when search results are displayed.

Again, many web page editing applications such as FrontPage, will allow you to enter this data into a menu or other "English-based" area in the application (in FrontPage, the same place as the Title Tag is entered).

#### **The Meta Keywords Tag**

The Meta Keywords Tag is another area that allows you to influence how search engines "view" the content of your page. Again, some search engines are influenced by Meta Keywords Tags, others aren't. One of the key things to remember when entering your keywords is that if you use keywords in your Meta Keywords Tag that are not part of the content of the page body, there's a very good chance that the search engine will ignore the keyword - and perhaps rank your page lower as well.

Keyword usage is a funny thing - you almost have to think like the searchers themselves. And one thing to remember is that most folks search on more specific terms that you might think. So - be specific and creative- vendors, capabilities, technologies, spacing of words - anything that can set your page apart - but IS used in the body of the text.

Again, in HTML:

```
<HEAD>
<TITLE>Home Office Reports Review of Notebook Computers</TITLE>
<META name="description" content = "Ratings and Review of Notebook and Laptop Computers.">
<META name="keywords" content="ratings, reviews, Gateway, HP, Compaq, Sony, Dell, Alienware">
</HEAD>
```

#### **Indexing Prevention**

Maybe you have a page you don't want the search engines to index, it's private to you or to specific customers/business partners. You can tell the search engines that this page should not be indexed through:

```
<HEAD>
```

---

```
<TITLE>No indexing of this page</TITLE>
<META NAME="ROBOTS" CONTENT="NOINDEX">
</HEAD>
```

### Summary

Meta tags can help search engines more efficiently and intelligently categorize the content you want to publish - and to help searchers find you and your business. However, you have to not only implement meta tags, but use them intelligently and honestly to achieve good results.

### Note

There are a number of companies that provide software and/or services to help you generate and optimize the use of meta tags on your sites. You'll often find them listed as SEO (Search Engine Optimization) software and/or services. Make sure that you understand the specific capabilities of the software and/or service BEFORE you invest your hard earned \$\$'s into them. Additionally, before you buy, make sure you are willing to put the effort into the keyword development process that is required to make these tools effective. Keyword development can be time-consuming and a real "creativity" drain.

December, 2005