WRITING META TAGS

Remember Your Motives

Search engine optimization isn't just about getting a top listing. Ultimately, webmasters optimize their pages in hopes of getting sales, or, for content-based sites, getting ad revenue. This should *always* be your first priority.

For example, consider that you were searching for "shoes," and that the first listing looked like this:

Shoes Online: Sneakers, Sandals, Shoes, New Shoes, Footwear

Come to Shoes Online to get shoes! We have all kinds of shoes, sandals, sneakers, and more. Shoes Online has great footwear. Click here for shoes!

Would you click on it? And furthermore, would you consider buying shoes from that website? You probably wouldn't.

Even though search engine optimization usually focuses on search engines, it's important to remember that everything you do still needs to appeal to users. Keep this in mind as you "optimize" your title and Meta tags. I've seen many sites that have titles like the one above, and they may get a good ranking, but the person ranked lower than them (just a few positions lower) will get more clicks than they do. Why? It's simple, the title is more attractive, and is well optimized without looking like keyword spamming.

What's Your Deal?

What do you want your title and description to accomplish? Most likely, you would make a list that looks something like this:

1. Put your site at the top of search results.

2. Quickly and accurately tell users what your site is about.

3. Convey a positive image of your company.

This is a good time to think about what makes your website unique. Does it have lower prices? Do you have higher-quality items? Do you have a bigger inventory? Do you have useful content? You can't

possibly write a search listing if you aren't sure what your website is selling.

Now, choose the *one* key idea that you want every user to know before they even arrive at your website. Also, choose *one* key phrase that describes your website. **Remember:** If you want to make a phrase a "secondary" phrase, then that's probably not what your site is about. From the shoes example:

- **Key Idea:** We have a large selection of shoes.

- **Key Word or Phrase:** shoes

Keep these in mind as you write your title and Meta tags.

Write the Description First

Most people write a title, and then Meta tags. I, on the other hand, prefer to write the description (Meta tag) first. There's a reason for this, it's to ensure I have a clear idea of what I want to emphasize about my site.

Write one or two sentences that describes what your site is all about. Although you can include more than one aspect of your site, the primary impression that a reader gets should be the main idea that you wrote. Remembering the idea and word that I came up with earlier, I might write something like this for my description:

We sell a large selection of shoes, including athletic, formal, and casual. All shoes in our inventory have free shipping.

Things to consider:

- You should use your keyword or phrase two to three times in your description.

- Try to keep it as short as you can.

- Don't say that you're the "best," the "biggest", etc. This means nothing to users.

- Don't use exclamation points--ever.

- If you can live without a word, don't use it.

Writing the Title

Now, trim down your description to a phrase or two. You can use this in your title. For a title, I'm going to use:

Shoes Online - A Variety of Shoes with Free Shipping

It's best to use either a keyword twice or a key phrase once. Note that it's short and to the point. This is important. Now you can see why I used a description first, as by writing a description it enabled me to then pull my title based on my description.

Here's the original listing:

Shoes Online: Sneakers, Sandals, Shoes, New Shoes, Footwear
Come to Shoes Online to get shoes! We have all kinds of shoes, sandals, sneakers, and more. Shoes Online has great footwear. Click here for shoes!

And the new listing:

Shoes Online - A Variety of Shoes with Free Shipping
We sell a large selection of shoes, including athletic, formal, and casual. All shoes in our inventory have free shipping.

The major difference between the two is that the latter achieves the keyword indexing focus for my primary keyword without reducing its keyword relevancy weight, and it gives a nice description that displays a good aspect of what we are offering. I'm pretty sure that "Free Shipping" would entice a few more users to click than listing out a bunch of keywords in my title.

Remember, the key is to combine optimization with good marketing.

Writing the Keyword Tag

Most search engines (Google being the main exception) recognize a special tag which allows you to list keywords that your page is relevant to. These are invisible to users, but will raise your rank for searches with those words in them.

I recommend using about ten words, though you shouldn't use the same word more than three times (or the search engines will penalize you). Don't include helper words like "and" or "with."

Make a list of search phrases that you want to be listed under. If you follow our shoes example, and remembering to use the [overture search suggestion tool](#), we can come up with the following keywords:

- shoes
- discount shoes
- cheap shoes
- shoes free shipping
- discount shoes free shipping
- sandals
- athletic shoes
- sandals free shipping
- discount athletic shoes
- (and all combinations thereof)

Now, your challenge is to create a list of approximately 10 words, while not using the same word more than three times. Also, keep in mind that search engines do consider which keywords are placed next to each other (they are assumed to have relevance to one another). So, my list will look like this:

cheap discount shoes free shipping shoes sandals discount athletic shoes

Putting it All Together

Now, the HTML that goes in my <HEAD> tag will look something like this:

<HEAD>
<TITLE>Shoes Online - A Variety of Shoes with Free Shipping</TITLE>
<META name="description" content="We sell a large selection of shoes, including athletic, formal, and casual. All shoes in our inventory have free shipping.">
<META name="keywords" content="cheap discount shoes free shipping shoes sandals discount athletic shoes">
</HEAD>

Overall Title & Meta Tags Conclusion

Keep in mind that fewer and fewer search engines are displaying Meta descriptions, and almost none show Meta keywords. However, in many

search engines these still make a difference in your rank for a given term.

But the Meta tags won't give you an astronomical ranking for those terms. Google doesn't consider Meta tags at all. More likely, it will increase your rank (at engines besides Google) if you also use those terms in your site's content as well.

For the time being, Meta tags are still worth it, since many engines use them as a significant factor.

Titles, on the other hand, are not only obvious to the user, but can also be a huge factor in your ranking.

All in all, titles and Meta tags are definitely important, but inbound links and your site's textual content are still just as significant.