

What Are Meta Tags and How Do They Work?

Search engines are in the business of giving searchers what they are looking for, so they are always looking for information that describes what every page on your website is about. You can help the search engines by using meta tags.

Meta tags are snippets of code in the source code of a web page that give the search engines information about that web page. While a person viewing the web page doesn't see them, the search engines do. There are about a dozen different meta tags but two are most important for our purposes: the Title tag and the Description tag. Their names pretty much tell you what they do. The Title tag is the title of the page and the Description tag is a brief description of what that page is about.

How Meta Tags Help

The search engines will rank your web pages for the words in your Title tag. How high the search engines place your web pages in the search results depends on whether you're doing other things right and how many other sites are competing for those same key phrases. While the search engines don't use the Description tag as a factor in your rankings, the Description tag is still very important. The Description tag should "make the sale by enticing the searcher to click on your listing in the search results as opposed to your competitors.

You might have heard that you should use the Keyword meta tag too, but don't bother. In the early days of the internet the Keyword meta tag was a list of words to help the search engines understand what the web page was about. But search engines don't give any importance to the keyword meta tag any more. Frankly, all it does is tell your competitors what you're trying to rank for and possibly give them ideas for key phrases they should try to rank for too.

Meta tags are REALLY important! In fact, I've had more than one client's site get on the first page of the search results just by adding or changing meta tags. Even sites programmed in search engine un-friendly languages like Flash can see rankings improve by adding meta tags.

Meta Tags at Work

Meta Tags in the Search Results

You can see the Title and Description tags at work by doing a simple web search. Here is the first search result when I type "growing dahlias" into Google.



growing dahlias

Search

[Advanced Search](#)
[Preferences](#)

Web [+ Show options...](#)

Results 1 - 10 of about 73,500 for

[Planting, Growing and Caring for Dahlias](#)

A guide to the care and cultivation of **Dahlia** plants, with tips on planting, digging and winter storing.

www.thegardenhelper.com/dahlia.html - [Cached](#) - [Similar](#) - [Share](#) [Print](#) [Close](#)

The Title tag of the page is the first line of text that is blue and underlined. In this case, the title tag is “Planting, Growing and Caring for Dahlias.” The words “growing” and “dahlias” are bold because they were words used in the search. If the search term had been “caring for dahlias,” those words would have been in bold instead. The next 2 lines of text are the Description tag. In this case the description is “A guide to the care and cultivation of Dahlia plants, with tips on planting, digging and winter storing.”

Meta Tags on Your Website

The following is the source code of the webpage. The Title tag is outlined in red and the Description tag is outlined in blue.

```

dahlia[1] - Notepad
File Edit Format View Help
<HTML>
<HEAD>
<TITLE>Planting, Growing and Caring for Dahlias</TITLE>
<META name="description" content="A guide to the care and cultivation of Dahlia plants,
with tips on planting, digging and winter storing">
<META name="keywords" content="dahlias, tubers, dahlia, soil, plants, plant, tuber, growing, flow
<meta http-equiv="Page-Exit" content="revealTrans(Duration=3,Transition=23)">
</head>
<BODY BGCOLOR="#FFFFFF" TEXT="#006A00" LINK="#0000B9" VLINK="#CA0000" BACKGROUND="graphics/paper2.
<CENTER>
<!-- Created by CoffeeCup Image Mapper++ (www.coffeecup.com) -->
<b>Celebrating 10 years of helping your gardens c
<a href="http://www.thegardenhelper.com/" title="Garden Helper Home Page" onMouseover="window.stat
<a href="http://www.thegardenhelper.com/gardenerindex.html" title="Gardening for beginners" onMous
<A HREF="http://www.thegardenhelper.com/gardeningguides.html" title="Gardening Guides" onMouseover
<a href="http://www.thegardenhelper.com/houseplants.html" title="House Plant care and cultivation"
<A HREF="http://www.thegardenhelper.com/dictionary.html" title="Garden Glossary" onMouseover="winc

```

Besides helping your website rank better for your key phrases, well written meta tags ideally make the searcher click on your listing instead of your competitor's. If your web page doesn't have meta tags, the search engines pull a snippet of text from the page and display that instead. There's no guarantee they will use text that works to your advantage. So, I strongly recommend you check your meta tags and make sure each page has a unique title and description tag. If not, write them and have your programmer add them. It shouldn't cost very much to add them and they're definitely worth the return on investment.