

NET MAN

Business Websites That Work!

“Ask NET MAN” Column
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New Mexico Internet Professionals Association Educational
Foundation’s Internet Informer

Q: What is a META tag and how do I create them for my website?

A: Have you ever searched for a website using a search engine such as Google.com or Yahoo? You type in descriptive words for the kind of information you are seeking. For example, if you are looking for list of web site developers, you might type in: web design company (or something similar). The search engine performs various matches on information in it’s database and returns results relevant to what you’ve searched on.

In the early 1990s, meta tags were created to summarize information about web pages in a standard, computer understandable format. While there are many types of meta tags which add code information, indicate creator, character set, robot spidering and language type of the document as well as those which advise web browser software about page redirection and caching, what you’re probably referring to are the keyword and description meta tags. The description tag provides a summary of the page, while the keywords tag provides keywords to associate with your page.

Search Engine results are generated by different comparison and sorting methods that each search engine uses, so accurate meta tags could help to improve your ranking on the search engines. Meta tags are only one piece of search engine optimization strategy and meta tags alone will not significantly raise the ranking of your website if it lacks sufficient textual content. Statistics show that just over 20% of web pages use keyword and description meta tags, so your website can definitely be found without the use of meta tags and you don’t absolutely need them.

A problem with meta tags is that not all websites have implemented them honestly, accurately and ethically. Due to abuse of deliberately misleading

meta tags, all but one search engine has abandoned the use of them in ranking schemes. While specialists **searchenginewatch.com** and **traffick.com** declared meta tags dead in October 2002, Inktomi continues to support the use of meta tags. Inktomi is important because it powers parts of searches on AOL, Excite, MSN, HotBot, Looksmart and About.com, so it’s a good idea to continue to include meta tags on the primary pages of your Website.

Meta tags exist as text within the Hyper Text Markup Language (HTML) code of your website, and are not visible when the web browser displays a page. You will need access to change the underlying code of your website, or ask a web developer to help you add meta tags. Meta tags should be placed within the **head** section of a web page, preferably following the **title** tag (which is far more important for search engine listings). Meta tags should have accurate words pertaining to the content of the page. Use a service such as **wordtracker.com** to check relevancy and number of searches on words you are considering. Be sure to discuss meta tags and search engine optimization strategies with your web developer.

Lastly, below shows what these tags look like and some guidelines:

Meta Description Tag

The summary message should not exceed about 25 words and you should also have a summary paragraph on the page which is the first visible text on the screen. Sample meta description tags are:

```
<meta name="description" content="New Mexico Internet Professionals Association" />
```

```
<meta name="description" content="Full service website design and development company. Consulting, Integration and Design are
```

consulting • integration • design • maintenance • hosting • marketing

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complemented by maintenance, e-commerce, hosting and marketing." />

Meta Keywords Tag

Should contain at least 4 keywords with a comma and space between each one and preferably no more than 256 total characters. Put your most important words at the beginning and never insert the same word twice in a row in this tag, even if you're using different variations (plurals, ALL CAPS, different tenses, etc.). You can use the same word in different phrases, but never use that word more than 3 or 4 times total. Sample meta keyword tags are:

```
<meta name="keywords" content="association, internet association, internet education, internet organization, new mexico internet" />
```

```
<meta name="keywords" content="website designer, website developer, ecommerce, branding, consulting, integration, design, maintenance, hosting, marketing, search engine optimization, search engine submission, NetMan, Net Man, management" />
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Meta tag code can be generated online at sites that perform search engine services, such as at <http://submitexpress.com/metatag.html>.

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