

Why Doesn't Anybody Visit My Website?

Using Meta Tags and Search Engine Rankings to Make an Impact

By Chris Freise

So, you've built a website and posted it for the world to see. Having launched your global marketing campaign, just sit back and reap the rewards. Sounds too good to be true? That's because it is.

A successful website must be accessible to customers. So, unless customers can find your website, it doesn't matter how amazing it is or how good your product is. In January 2003, there were more than 40 million¹ commercial (.com) websites on the Internet, and the number is growing. With all that spam and cyber noise, how will you lead your customers to the treasure on your site?

You have to leave clues (search words, Meta Tags, and computer language markers) so search engines can recognize the value in your site, and lead your potential customers directly to you. Your clues must be clear so that customer web searches by key "search words" will return your website first in the list of results, at the top of the customer's "search engine ranking".

But what if this is the first you've heard of Meta Tags, search word and search engine rankings? Do you need to hire a specialist to optimize your Internet website? Or do you take the time to develop another skill that you can easily add to your expertise as a self-sufficient entrepreneur? Often businesses do not have the budget to hire an outside firm expressly to increase their site's search engine rankings, and many who do have the budget will find it useful to learn the ins and outs of Search Engine Optimization (SEO). Below, are some basic techniques to enhance your website's visibility on the Internet. Welcome to SEO 101.

Meta Tags

Let's start at the beginning. A Meta Tag is information that web page designers and programmers insert into the "Head" area of your website's HTML code like a "header" on a Microsoft word document. Unlike the Word document header, the information in the Meta Tag is invisible to website visitors. The only way people can read the Meta Tag is to look at the actual source HTML code, the program used to generate the webpages on the site. Even though it is not part of the customer interface of your site, the Meta Tag is very important because it is the clue many search engines use it to correctly categorize, and rank your website for customers (Meta Tag indexing). And of course customers, in turn, use search engines to make an ordered list of where on the Internet they will shop for goods and services. If your site has no Meta Tags, search engines (and customers) will likely pass it by. If you have the wrong Meta Tags, your search engine rankings will be so low on the search results that your customers will miss it.

You may be thinking that Meta Tag indexing is a haphazard means for search engines to categorize, and rank websites. The good news: there has been a decline in Meta Tag indexing by most major search engines in favor of more reliable search algorithms. Meta tags, however, are by no means obsolete. They are still very much a useful tool, if supplemented by appropriate web page content and web page title tags. But small businesses easily achieve better search engine rankings on their own, if they successfully implement a few simple characteristics into their website's design. Even if you are unfamiliar with computer programming and HTML code, structuring effective Meta Tags is straightforward, if you follow the framework of the example below.

Meta Tag and Homepage Text Agreement

The two most commonly used Meta tags are "keywords" and "description" tags. Let's look at the code for these two tags using the source code from Doherty and Associates' own website and then discuss exactly how they are used in more depth:

¹ Source: Internet Software Consortium (<http://www.isc.org/>), Distribution of Top-Level Domain Names by Host Count Jan 2003

Line #	Source Code
1	<HEAD>
2	<TITLE>Doherty and Associates – A Premier Business Advisory Firm – San Francisco</TITLE>
3	<META name="description" content="Doherty & Associates, Ltd., is a premier business advisory firm specializing in business strategies, business plans, and fund raising. Let us help you transform your vision into reality.">
4	<META name="keywords" content="doherty, doherty and associates, doherty associates ltd, business plan, business development, advisors, entrepreneurship, entrepreneurs, funding, VC, strategy, consulting, consultant, san Francisco">
5	</HEAD>


Figure 1 - DOHERTY ASSOCIATES SOURCE CODE META TAGS

The Meta description tag is shown on Line 3 of Figure 1. The Meta Keyword Tag is shown on Line 4 of Figure 1. These Meta Tags influences how your web page is described in the search engine results that users see. Google does not use Meta Tags to rank your site, but many other commonly-used search engines such as Yahoo do. Shown below is a comparison of how our Doherty and Associates our website is displayed in both Google and Yahoo's search results.

Google's Results:

[Doherty and Associates - A Premier Business Advisory Firm - San ...](#)
Doherty & Associates is a premier business advisory firm. With our business development and venture strategy experience, we can ...
[www.dohertyassoc.com/](#) - 9k - [Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#) .

Yahoo's Results:

[Doherty and Associates - A Premier Business Advisory Firm - San ...](#) 
Doherty & Associates, Ltd., is a premier business advisory firm specializing in business strategies, business plans, and fund raising. ...
[www.dohertyassoc.com/](#) - 9k - [Cached](#) - [More pages from this site](#)

Google used the first few lines from the homepage to generate the website's description, while Yahoo used the Meta Description Tag and Title Tag. If the Meta Description Tag, Title Tag and Homepage Text of your site do not agree, your website will be recognized differently by different search engines. If your website does not include Meta Tags, it might not be picked up by a search engine like Yahoo. This example demonstrates the first simple rule of SEO:

Rule #1: Use text from your homepage content as your Meta description tag and vice versa.

Using text from your homepage content as your Meta description tag gives your webpage a general consistency that will result in higher search engine rankings. REMEMBER, TEXT CONSISTENCY THROUGH YOUR META TAGS AND WEBPAGE CONTENT IS IMPORTANT AND CAN ENHANCE PAGE RANKING.

Rule #2: Use Keywords to Your Advantage

The Meta Tag Keyword is shown on Line 4 of Figure 1:

```
<META name="keywords" content="doherty, doherty and associates, doherty associates ltd,
business plan, business development, advisors, entrepreneurship, entrepreneurs, funding, VC,
strategy, consulting, consultant, san francisco">
```

The Meta Keywords Tag allows you to specify additional search “keywords” words that could be associated with your website but are not included in your webpage content. This allows customers searching for information about “entrepreneurship” to find the Doherty and Associates website even though no forms of the word “entrepreneur” are included in Doherty’s Meta Description Tag or Title. In the Doherty and Associates example above you may notice that some words appear to repeat. Repeating text is often misunderstood when it comes to the Meta Keywords Tags. This repeating text is important and useful to developing effective Meta Keyword Tags because it identifies all the different iterations of the keyword that might be used. This example illustrates SEO Rule #2.

Rule #3: Effective use of Meta Keyword Tags widens your net for potential customers.

The dark side of SEO Rule #2 is Meta Keyword Tag abuse, which as a reputable business you should avoid. In your own internet searches, you may have noticed that some search engine results have nothing to do with your search subject. Many popular search words such as “Britney Spears” have been used on ad driven websites having nothing to do with the keyword, This Meta Keyword Tag abuse has contributed to the decline in its use as an indexing tool by search engines.

Presently, Inktomi is the only search engine that supports the meta keywords tag, so it is probably not worth the painstaking effort finding out what are the perfect keywords for your website. Meta Keyword Tags, however, are an important tool to compliment your other SEO efforts. To effectively implement Meta Keyword Tags be sure to:

- Include common misspellings of your company name, website or employees;
- Limit your list to no more than 25 words;
- Separate the keywords with commas; and
- Never repeat the same word more than a few times.

After you’ve put these simple points in place, leave the keywords alone. Spending your time improving the other areas of your website such as content, description tags or title tags is time much better spent.

Title Tags

Finally, we come to the title tag which is not technically a Meta Tag but works in the same way.. Search engines use the title tag for indexing and it is found in the head HTML section along with the Meta Tags. The browser uses the Title Tag to provide a title for the page that comes up in a search query. For example, the Doherty and Associates Title Tag (shown in Figure 1 above) reads: “<TITLE>Doherty and Associates – A Premier Business Advisory Firm – San Francisco</TITLE>”. This is the same as the first line returned in both the Google and Yahoo search examples shown above. So the final rule for SEO 101:

Rule #4 Don’t forget the Title Tags

The Title Tag makes a big difference in website rankings, especially when it comes to Google Search Results. Your Title Tag should be short (less than 40 characters) and, most importantly, should match the search queries people will be using to find your site. It is usually helpful to include your business city or location because this is often how search engines categorize websites and how people tend to search for things on the Internet. Like the Meta Description Tag, the Title Tag is another way that you can influence how your website is displayed in search results.

Optimizing Your Own Website

Now that you are ready to begin work on fine tuning your own website, here are some final words of encouragement and advice: Before you change anything, use your favorite search engine and type in some search words that you would like to be indexed under. If you come up, great! If not, don’t be discouraged, but look at the sites that do come up and try to see what they have in common in their description, keywords, title tags and content. You can do this by clicking the “View” link in your browser and then “Source” to look at the source code. This should provide insight on how your website should strive to blend the different tags with your website content. Making the changes is easy; if you follow the basic rules outlined in the examples above.

Rule #1: Use text from your homepage content as your Meta Description Tag and vice versa.

Rule #2: Use Keywords to Your Advantage

- Add additional “key words” that customers might use to describe you business or services to your Meta Keyword Tag
- To effectively implement Meta Keyword Tags be sure to:
 1. Include common misspellings of your company name, website or employees;
 2. Limit your list to no more than 25 words;
 3. Separate the keywords with commas; and
 4. Never repeat the same word more than a few times.

Rule #3: Effective use of Meta Keyword Tags widens your net for potential customers.

Rule #4 Don't forget the Title Tags

- Keep Title Tags short
- Include descriptive words your customers are likely to use in their searches
- Don't forget to include your business location or city

Remember to change only the “content” text, the words between quotation marks—and not the programming part of your source code. Finally, be patient as it sometimes takes as long as 3 weeks for search engines to recrawl your site and update search rankings.

About the author: Chris Freise joined Doherty & Associates in October 2003 after graduating from Stanford University this past year. While an undergraduate, Chris interned for a financial services consulting firm and worked as a research assistant for the Stanford Center for Health Policy and Research. Additionally, he served as the Vice-President and Alumni Relations Chair for his fraternity. In his spare time, Chris does volunteer work for the Surfrider Foundation and enjoys surfing, traveling, and blues music.

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