

Search Engine Optimization

Follow these guidelines to optimize your Web pages for search engines.

Meta Tags

Most external search engines are disregarding keyword Meta tags these days, so optimizing efforts should focus on page content and structure, description Meta tag and title. If you want to keyword Meta tag your home page or a few other important pages the Meta tags must meet the following standards:

- Verify that the syntax is correct on Meta descriptions and Meta keywords.
- Create unique Meta descriptions and Meta keywords for each page; i.e., do not use the same Meta tags on different pages.
- For Meta descriptions, do not exceed 200 characters; include the most important content in the first 150 characters.
- Limit Meta keywords for home pages to the site name and a few general keywords that reflect the subject matter in the site. Meta keywords containing 200-300 characters are sufficient for most sites.
- Limit Meta keywords for non-home pages to keywords that appear in the content of that page. They should only contain a few major keywords or phrases that reflect the page content.

"Stop Index" Tags

"Stop Index" tags are designed to "hide" (i.e., cause the search engine to ignore) some of the text on the page because it is not important to the content of the page. The "stopindex" tag will cause the search engine to stop indexing content from the page (i.e., start ignoring it), and the "startindex" tag will cause the search engine to start indexing content again (i.e., stop ignoring it).

For example, navigation is very similar on all pages and is not indicative of the content on the page. Thus a "stopindex" tag is placed before this text, and a "startindex" is placed after it, so that the search engine does not associate "Newsletter" or "About Us" with every Web page that contains that text in its menu. "Stop index" tags keep content such as navigation and Section 508 requirements from being indexed by the internal search engine.

All your pages should have these tags surrounding navigational elements and search boxes. For each "stopindex" tag, there must be an associated "startindex" tag somewhere following it on the page. They should appear only in the <BODY> element and they cannot be nested. This is regular HTML comment syntax, with "stopindex" or "startindex" as the only characters (i.e., no spaces).

```
<!--stopindex-->
```

Text based navigation or other text that's not pertinent to the content of the page.

```
<!--startindex-->
```

Header Meta Tag Structure

All pages should include the following Meta data customized as needed.

Web Guidelines and Standards

- `<Meta name="description" content="Mad Cow information or whatever" />` - 200 characters or less
- `<Meta name="keywords" content="mad cow, bse, whatever" />` - 200 characters or less
- `<Meta name="Copyright" content="© 2007 John Webb Consulting" />`

Adapted from U.S. Department of Energy - Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy Communication Standards & Guidelines.