Search Engine Signage

By: Chris Bachman | November 16, 2016

Your Title and META Description tags are among the most important elements on a web page. Think of them as the sign you place alongside the highway which is a search engine results page. They are the place where your website, the search engine, and the eyeballs of the person searching all come together. It is where the rubber meets the road! Getting these tags right means higher rankings and more conversions. Getting them wrong, as so many people (including developers) do, means doom, gloom, and deep despair. Checking these at launch, a month after launch, and again every six months or so will allow you to fine-tune them to be better than your competitors' tags, avoid mistakes like duplicate or missing tags, and keep them current and representative of your changing business offerings.
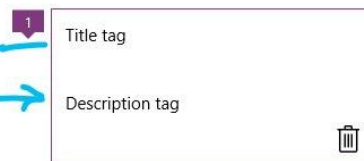
What Are They

These two pieces of information are found in the <head> section of a website page. This is the area search engines see but you wouldn't when viewing the page. Most information in the <head> section remains invisible to the viewer unless they go looking for it specifically. There is an exception, though: the Title tag and META Description tag. These items are visible to the casual viewer and to anyone who has ever done a search in Google, Bing, or Yahoo. They look like this:

Why Are They Important

Think of these tags like your "elevator pitch." They tell a person why they should click on your site over all the others. Being the first, and often only, opportunity you have to connect with a potential client. Getting these

mini-sales pitches right is crucial to converting searches to sales, or to at the very least leading to clicks to your site.

The more accurate and compelling these tags are, and the more skillfully they are written, the more promise they hold for better rankings and results.

What Are The Important Pieces To Include?

Getting the pieces right is the secret to success. Here is what to keep an eye on:

Length

If the length of either the Title or the Description tag is longer than the space allowed, it gets truncated. The search engines don't like that, and you lose that amount of copy as well. The allowed character count is not exact as different screen sizes and resolutions will affect the final count, but here are the rules of thumb to try and stick to:

Titles – keep to 60 characters including spaces.

Descriptions – keep to 150 characters including spaces.

Keywords

By now you know that each page should be focused on one or two main keywords/phrases. These words should be in your Title as well as your Description. No opting out of this piece…do it.

Positioning

Positioning of your keywords is important, and keeping the most important one to the left of the Title is preferred, although not crucial. Making sure your keyword phrase appears in the Description, and as close to the start of the copy as possible, is also important.

Formatting

Titles: Keep the most important keyword to the left side of the Title, use pipes (|) to minimize pixel space used, and use "&"'s to save space. Also, when using the symbol &, be sure the way it is written in the code is **&**.

Descriptions: Try to avoid interrupting your Description with periods (.).Search engines can use this as an excuse to jump down and grab other copy from the page instead of using your otherwise superbly crafted description copy. Write your description (and Title) to honestly represent what the page is about. No one likes to be fooled, and search engines notice when people click on a site and then leave immediately because it didn't deliver what was promised.

CTA

Call-To-Action: If you can offer something to entice a click through, do it. Use of phrases like Free Quotes, Free Estimates, Same-Day Service, etc., are all ways to catch someone's eye and encourage them to click.

Ease of Contact

My stealth weapon when writing Descriptions is to include the phone number, as you can see in the example above. You will also notice that the search engines automatically made it a clickable link. The benefit of this is

that when someone wants a solution to a search quickly, I am the first and easiest one to reach as my phone number is right there for them. They don't have to click to a website and dig around for the number…and it is clickable.

How To Review Your Current Title & Description Tags

Right click on the website page in question and select View Source. Up comes a bunch of code which represents the page. At the top of the page look for this <head> and then slowly scroll down until you locate this </head>. Between these two is the "head" section of your page.

Within the code found between these two items you will find the Title and Description tags. In the example shown above, the code view of the Title and Description look like this.

<title>Utah Website Design | Utah Website Developer**</title>**
<**META name="Description" content="**Utah website developer designs professional, small business websites with expert SEO, website marketing, and consulting. Free Quotes 435-631-2595">

TIP: Remember: Every page should have its own keyword focus and should answer a specific search query. And, following that, every page's Title & Description should be unique and reflect that page's keyword and solution.

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