



## Meta Tag Misunderstandings

By Dave Kelly

<http://www.search-engine-goldmine.com>

By now almost everyone has heard of Meta tags. Unfortunately there is a lot of misunderstanding as to what exactly Meta tags do and what they don't do.

Far too many people are convinced that all they need to do to get a top search engine ranking is to fill their meta keyword tag with a lot of relevant keywords and like magic, they will get a top ranking. This is far from the reality. First of all, every search engine treats Meta Tags differently, they recognize different tags, the influence they have on your page ranking varies greatly from one search engine to another. The meta keyword tag in particular is not used by many of the major search engines including Google which also does not use the Meta Description tag. Yet the myth persists that by simply placing meta tags in your page, you have optimized your web page. **WRONG.**

Just filling your meta keyword tag with what you believe are your primary keywords without understanding the relationship of the meta tags to the rest of the page can actually result in your site getting a LOWER ranking than if you never used meta tags to begin with. There are NO search engines that decide your ranking based solely on your Meta Tags. So stop thinking they are the answer. They are one small part of optimizing your page. Having said that, let's look at some general information on Meta Tags, what they are, what they do and how to use them. Remember, this information is not geared to any specific search engine but rather an overview of what these tags do.

Meta tags do provide a useful way to control your listing in some search engines, to a point. On pages that lack text, such as an opening splash screen, Meta tags can be helpful. Frames pages can also benefit from Meta tags. However, simply including a Meta tag is not a guarantee that your page will achieve a high ranking in the various search engines. They do have their purpose, but treat them as an aide and not the ultimate answer for achieving high search engine rankings.

The most important Meta tags used for search engine optimization are the 'description' and 'keywords' tags. The 'description' tag returns a description of the page for some search engines. Not all search engines will use your Meta description tag, some will take the first lines of text from your page and use that as the summary you see in the search engines. The 'keywords' tag provides the search engine various keywords that will be used to index your page. It is only a guide.

Putting a keyword in your Meta keywords tag doesn't mean that your page will rank high or even rank at all for those words. As I said earlier, very few search engines factor the meta keyword tag when determining the ranking of your site. Some do index the content of the tag, they know it is there, but it will not help you.

What happens to your page if there are no Meta tags present in some search engines? Let's assume you created a page with a title of 'Joe's Home Page' and your first few lines of text on the page says 'Welcome to Joe's Party!'

Some search engines will return a listing that says 'Joe's Home Page', as the title and a description of 'Welcome to Joe's Party'

Maybe this page has content related to selling supplies for birthday parties. Nothing that the search engine found gives any indication of what your page content deals with.

Let's use the Meta tags to let the search engine know more about the specifics of your page.

The Meta tags go inside the header tags, so that everything looks like this:

```
<HEAD><TITLE>Joe's Home Page</TITLE><META  
name="description" content="Party supplies, everything you  
need to know to plan a successful party!."><META  
name="keywords" content="party, parties, birthday, planning,  
clowns"></HEAD>
```

In search engines that support the 'descriptions' tag, the search engine will return a listing something like, "Joe's Home Page, as the title and a description of 'Party supplies, everything you need to know to plan a successful party!'

Do you see that the search listing matches what you entered on the description tag? That's exactly what the 'description' tag is supposed to do.

Now looking at the above, you can see that the title is still a problem, it does not describe in any way what your business does. More on that shortly.

You're probably asking, what about the meta keywords tag? Doesn't it help my page to be shown in the search engine if someone types in any of my keywords as part of their search?. If someone enters the word party into a search engine, a few search engines 'may' match one of your keywords in your tag. But don't bet the farm on it. Most of the big search engines simply don't use it, or it carries no more weight than regular text.

The placement of your keywords IS very important and the Meta keyword tag can actually have a negative impact on your site's ranking.

Here's how. Your keywords MUST appear in other places on your page. If the keyword is not present in the actual text of the page, not present in the title of the page, the search engines will often deem this an irrelevant keyword and drop the ranking of your page. If the keyword doesn't appear somewhere on your page, don't place it in your keyword meta tag.

I've seen site after site cram 100 largely irrelevant keywords into the meta keyword tag thinking they have found search engine nirvana, only to end up in the search engine graveyard on page 400 +.

The 'robots' tag is another Meta tag that is being used more and more although not all search engines support it. This tag lets you specify that a certain page should not be indexed by a search engine spider. This is the format for using the 'robots' tag.

```
<META NAME="robots" CONTENT="NOINDEX">
```

Some other useful Meta tags

```
<META NAME="copyright" CONTENT="xxxxxx">
```

```
<META NAME="rating" CONTENT="general">
```

```
<META NAME="Author" CONTENT="xxxxxx">
```

```
<META NAME="Content-Language" CONTENT="xxxxxx">
```

At the very least, make certain you add Meta description and Meta keyword tags to your web pages. They will definitely help you with some search engines. But be careful how you use them. Make certain what you place in these tags relates to your page and actually appears in your pages content.

Choosing the proper keywords is perhaps the single most important factor in optimizing your site. Without the right keywords your chances of search engine traffic are slim.

And this is far more involved than simply finding words that you think apply to your business. You must know how many times words are actively being searched, and how many competing pages there for a given keyword. It's kind of pointless to go after a keyword if it has 32 million competing pages.

This article was written by Dave Kelly, owner of [Arundel.net](http://Arundel.net) Incorporated Search engine Optimization Services.