

Meta element

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Meta elements are HTML elements used to provide structured metadata about a web page. Such elements must be placed as tags in the `head` section of an HTML document.

Contents

- 1 Meta element use in search engine optimization
 - 1.1 The keywords attribute
 - 1.2 The description attribute
 - 1.3 The robots attribute
 - 1.3.1 Additional attributes for search engines
 - 1.3.1.1 NOODP
 - 1.3.1.2 NOYDIR
 - 1.3.1.3 Robots-NoContent
 - 1.4 Academic studies
- 2 Meta tags use in social bookmarking
- 3 Redirects
- 4 HTTP message headers
- 5 Alternative to meta elements
- 6 See also
- 7 References
- 8 External links

Meta element use in search engine optimization

Meta elements provide information about a given webpage, most often to help search engines categorize them correctly. They are inserted into the HTML document, but are often not directly visible to a user visiting the site.

They have been the focus of a field of marketing research known as search engine optimization (SEO), where different methods are explored to provide a user's site with a higher ranking on search engines. In the mid to late 1990s, search engines were reliant on meta data to correctly classify a web page and webmasters quickly learned the commercial significance of having the right meta element, as it frequently led to a high ranking in the search engines — and thus, high traffic to the web site.

As search engine traffic achieved greater significance in online marketing plans, consultants were brought in who were well versed in how search engines perceive a web site. These consultants used a variety of techniques (legitimate and otherwise) to improve ranking for their clients.

Meta elements have significantly less effect on search engine results pages today than they did in the 1990's and their utility has decreased dramatically as search engine robots have become more sophisticated. This is due in part to the nearly infinite re-occurrence (keyword stuffing) of meta elements and/or to attempts by unscrupulous website placement consultants to manipulate (spamdexing) or otherwise circumvent search engine ranking algorithms. While search engine optimization can improve search engine ranking, consumers of such services should be careful to employ only reputable providers.

Major search engine robots are more likely to quantify such factors as the volume of incoming links

from related websites, quantity and quality of content, technical precision of source code, spelling, functional v. broken hyperlinks, volume and consistency of searches and/or viewer traffic, time within website, page views, revisits, click-throughs, technical user-features, uniqueness, redundancy, relevance, advertising revenue yield, freshness, geography, language and other intrinsic characteristics.

The keywords attribute

The `keywords` attribute was popularized by search engines such as Infoseek and AltaVista in 1995, and its popularity quickly grew until it became one of the most commonly used `meta` elements^[1]. By late 1997, however, search engine providers realized that information stored in `meta` elements, especially the `keyword` attribute, was often unreliable and misleading, and at worst, used to draw users into spam sites. (Unscrupulous webmasters could easily place false `keywords` into their `meta` elements in order to draw people to their site.)

Search engines began dropping support for metadata provided by the `meta` element in 1998, and by the early 2000s, most search engines had veered completely away from reliance on `meta` elements, and in July 2002 AltaVista, one of the last major search engines to still offer support, finally stopped considering them^[2]. The Director of Research at Google, Monika Henziger, was quoted (in 2002) as saying, "Currently we don't trust metadata"^[3].

No consensus exist whether or not the `keywords` attribute has any impact on ranking at any of the major search engine today. It is being speculated that they do, if the keywords used in the `meta` can be found in the page copy itself. 37 leaders in search engine optimization concluded in April 2007 that the relevance of having your keywords in the `meta` attribute `keywords` is little to none^[4].

The description attribute

Unlike the `keyword` attribute, the `description` attribute is supported by most major search engines, like Yahoo and Windows Live Search, while Google will fall back on this tag when information about the page itself is requested (e.g. using the `related: query`). The `description` attribute provides a concise explanation of a web page's content. This allows the webpage authors to give a more meaningful description for listings than might be displayed if the search engine was to automatically create its own description based on the page content. The description is often, but not always, displayed on search engine results pages, so it can impact click-through rates. Industry commentators have *suggested* that major search engines also consider keywords located in the `description` attribute when ranking pages.^[5]

The robots attribute

The `robots` attribute is used to control whether search engine spiders are allowed to index a page, or not, and whether they should follow links from a page, or not. The `noindex` value prevents a page from being indexed, and `nofollow` prevents links from being crawled. Other values are available that can influence how a search engine indexes pages, and how those pages appear on the search results. The `robots` attribute is supported by several major search engines^[6]. There are several additional values for the `robots` meta attribute that are relevant to search engines, such as `NOARCHIVE` and `NOSNIPPET`, which are meant to tell search engines what not to do with a web pages content.^[7] Meta tags are not the best option to prevent search engines from indexing content of your website. A more reliable and efficient method is the use of the Robots.txt file (Robots Exclusion Standard).

Additional attributes for search engines

NOODP

The search engines Google, Yahoo! and MSN use in some cases the title and abstract of the Open Directory Project (ODP) listing of a web site at Dmoz.org for the title and/or description (also called snippet or abstract) in the search engine results pages (SERPS). To give webmasters the option to specify that the ODP content should not be used for listings of their website, did Microsoft introduce in May 2006 the new "NOODP" value for the "robots" element of the meta tags^[8]. Google followed in July 2006^[9] and Yahoo! in October 2006^[10].

The syntax is the same for all search engines who support the tag.

```
<META NAME="ROBOTS" CONTENT="NOODP">
```

Webmasters can decide if they want to disallow the use of their ODP listing on a per search engine basis

```
Google: <META NAME="GOOGLEBOT" CONTENT="NOODP">
```

```
Yahoo! <META NAME="Slurp" CONTENT="NOODP">
```

```
MSN and Live Search: <META NAME="msnbot" CONTENT="NOODP">
```

NOYDIR

Yahoo! also used next to the ODP listing the content from their own Yahoo! directory but introduced in February 2007 a meta tag that provides webmasters with the option to opt-out of this^[11].

Yahoo! Directory titles and abstracts will not be used in search results for their pages if the NOYDIR tag is being added to a web page.

```
<META NAME="ROBOTS" CONTENT="NOYDIR">
```

```
<META NAME="Slurp" CONTENT="NOYDIR">
```

Robots-NoContent

Yahoo! also introduced in May 2007 the "class=robots-nocontent" tag.^[12] This is not a meta tag, but a tag, which can be used throughout a web page where needed. Content of the page where this tag is being used will be ignored by the Yahoo! crawler and not included in the search engine's index.

Examples for the use of the robots-nocontent tag:

```
<div class="robots-nocontent">excluded content</div>
```

```
<span class="robots-nocontent">excluded content</span>
```

```
<p class="robots-nocontent">excluded content</p>
```

Academic studies

Google does not use HTML keyword or metatag elements for indexing. The Director of Research at Google, Monika Henziger, was quoted (in 2002) as saying, "Currently we don't trust metadata" ^[13]. Other search engines developed techniques to penalize web sites considered to be "cheating the system". For example, a web site repeating the same meta keyword several times may have its ranking *decreased* by a search engine trying to eliminate this practice, though that is unlikely. It's more likely that a search engine will ignore the meta keyword element completely, and most do regardless of how many words used in the element.

Meta tags use in social bookmarking

In contrast to completely automated systems like search engines, author-supplied metadata can be useful in situations where the page content has been vetted as trustworthy by a reader.

Redirects

Meta refresh elements can be used to instruct a web browser to automatically refresh a web page after a given time interval. It is also possible to specify an alternative URL and use this technique in order to redirect the user to a different location. Using a meta refresh in this way and solely by itself rarely achieves the desired result. For Internet Explorer's security settings, under the miscellaneous category, meta refresh can be turned off by the user, thereby disabling its redirect ability entirely.

Many web design tutorials also point out that client side redirecting tends to interfere with the normal functioning of a web browser's "back" button. After being redirected, clicking the back button will cause the user to go back to the redirect page, which redirects them again. Some modern browsers seem to overcome this problem however, including Safari, Mozilla Firefox and Opera.

HTTP message headers

Meta elements of the form `<meta http-equiv="foo" content="bar">` can be used as alternatives to http headers. For example, `<meta http-equiv="expires" content="Wed, 21 Jun 2006 14:25:27 GMT">` would tell the browser that the page "expires" on June 21 2006 14:25:27 GMT and that it may safely cache the page until then.

Alternative to meta elements

An alternative to meta elements for enhanced subject access within a web site is the use of a back-of-book-style index for the web site. See examples at the web sites of the Australian Society of Indexers (<http://www.aussi.org/>) and the American Society of Indexers (<http://www.asindexing.org/>).

In 1994, ALIWEB, which was likely the first web search engine, also used an index file to provide the type of information commonly found in meta keywords attributes.

See also

- Resource Description Framework (RDF)

References

1. ^ Statistic (June 4,1997), META attributes by count (<http://vancouver-webpages.com/META/bycount.shtml>), *Vancouver Webpages*, retrieved June 3, 2007
2. ^ Danny Sullivan (October 1, 2002), Death Of A Meta Tag (<http://searchenginewatch.com/showPage.html?page=2165061>), *SearchEngineWatch.com*, retrieved June 3, 2007
3. ^ Journal of Internet Cataloging, Volume 5(1), 2002
4. ^ Rand Fishkin (April 2, 2007), Search Engine Ranking Factors V2 (<http://www.seomoz.org/article/search-ranking-factors>), *SEOmoz.org*, retrieved June 3, 2007
5. ^ Danny Sullivan, How To Use HTML Meta Tags (<http://searchenginewatch.com/showPage.html?page=2167931>), Search Engine Watch, December 5, 2002
6. ^ Vanessa Fox, Using the robots meta tag (<http://googlewebmastercentral.blogspot.com/2007/03/using-robots-meta-tag.html>), Official Google Webmaster Central Blog, 3/05/2007
7. ^ Danny Sullivan (March 5, 2007), Meta Robots Tag 101: Blocking Spiders, Cached Pages & More (<http://searchengineland.com/070305-204850.php>), *SearchEngineLand.com*, retrieved June 3, 2007
8. ^ Betsy Aoki (May 22, 2006), Opting Out of Open Directory Listings for Webmasters (<http://blogs.msdn.com/livesearch/archive/2006/05/22/603917.aspx>), *Live Search Blog*, retrieved June 3, 2007
9. ^ Vanessa Fox (July 13, 2006), More control over page snippets (<http://sitemaps.blogspot.com/2006/07/more-control-over-page-snippets.html>), *Inside Google Sitemaps*, retrieved June 3, 2007
10. ^ Yahoo! Search (October 24, 2006), Yahoo! Search Weather Update and Support for 'NOODP' (<http://www.ysearchblog.com/archives/000368.html>), *Yahoo! Search Blog*, retrieved June 3, 2007
11. ^ Yahoo! Search (February 28, 2007), Yahoo! Search Support for 'NOYDIR' Meta Tags and Weather Update (<http://www.ysearchblog.com/archives/000418.html>), *Yahoo! Search Blog*, retrieved June 3, 2007
12. ^ Yahoo! Search (May 02, 2007), Introducing Robots-Nocontent for Page Sections (<http://www.ysearchblog.com/archives/000444.html>), *Yahoo! Search Blog*, retrieved June 3, 2007
13. ^ Journal of Internet Cataloging, Volume 5(1), 2002

External links

- Search Engine Friendly Keyword Generator (<http://www.abramex.com/>)
- HTML 4.01 Specification: Meta data (<http://www.w3.org/TR/REC-html40/struct/global.html#h-7.4.4>)
- Meta tag generator (<http://www.metataggenerator.eu/meta-tag-generator/index.php>)
- Geo tag generator (<http://www.geo-tag.de/generator>)
- Meta tag is created in JavaScript (http://external-file.com/en/meta_tag_generator.html)
- Death of a meta tag (<http://searchenginewatch.com/sereport/article.php/2165061>)
- Meta Description Tag - Best practices (<http://www.seopedia.org/internet-marketing-and-seo/html-meta-description-tag/>)
- Optimising metadata to make high-value content more accessible to Google users (<http://cdlr.strath.ac.uk/pubs/dawsona/ad200503.htm>)
- The definitive guide to using the important meta tags (<http://www.accessibility101.org.uk/websitedesign101/definitivemetatags.htm>)

Retrieved from "http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meta_element"

Categories: [HTML](#) | [Search engine optimization](#)

-
- This page was last modified 17:23, 25 June 2007.
 - All text is available under the terms of the GNU Free Documentation License. (See **Copyrights** for details.) Wikipedia® is a registered trademark of the Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., a US-registered 501(c)(3) tax-deductible nonprofit charity.