

# Search Me, Please!

## A Guide on <META> tags in HTML and Getting Noticed by Search Engines



A Guide for Publishers of Websites

by John Hendron  
www.johnhendron.net

## Getting Noticed

A question I am often asked is:

*How do I get my website listed on Google?*

If the question isn't that one, it's either "on Yahoo!" or "on Ask Jeeves?", etc. The question is a valid one, because it's a deeply satisfying feeling to know that someone can type-in information that may be at your site, and find it, at your site, using one of these major players in the search engine market. For businesses, they of course want to be found—they'll make more money. For keepers of personal websites, it's a richly satisfying thing to know your ideas and thoughts are being read, and consumed, by the Internet-surfing world.

The answer many search engines will give you is: "Create a great website. People will come." It's true, really, but this guide will help you create a better website that will likely get things listed in your favorite search engines.

### Steps to Getting Noticed

1. Link to others, have others link to you.

The Google model for page ranking evidently ranks pages for what order they appear when you conduct a search. Pages rank first that link to other sites, or get linked to. It's not as much popularity as it is trust. If I like the content you list, I'll link to it. The more pages that link to you, the more hits you're likely to get, and the more Google trusts your site for good, quality content that other visitors will want.

2. Put good content at the beginning of your homepage.

Some search engines only look at the first part of your page. If it's filled with nonsense, like graphics files, Javascripts, and information about your site, then you ought to get rid of it. Create clean HTML code that puts content first.

3. Match the content in your pages with <META> tags.

META tags add information about your page. I'll discuss them in detail below, but it's not a bad idea to use these. They won't guarantee hits or listings, but they can help.

#### 4. Change the content.

Homepages that change content often look more desirable. Folks looking for sites online want fresh content. Some search engines will favor sites that offer fresh content.

#### 5. Spell things correctly.

People won't find your site for the topic you're writing about when it contains spelling mistakes—unless they make the same spelling errors.

#### 6. Submit your site URL to a search engine.

You can submit your URL to certain search engines. This won't guarantee a listing, but it might get the ball rolling if you start short on links. You can also advertise your URL on sites that allow posting of comments, etc., to add your URL to the cyberspace community.

#### 7. Present content in searchable form—use plain text—not graphics and Flash for your primary content.

Search engines find it easy to search and index text—but they can't see text if it's in a graphic.

#### 8. Use ALT attributes in your IMG tags.

Of course, good XHTML requires the use of ALT attributes as part of an image tag. This is content many visitors won't see, but search engines will.

#### 9. Don't try and fool search engines with supposed “popular” content in hidden places, such as META tags.

Trying to fool a search engine with a popular search term once worked. Now search engines will discredit you in their result rankings when you include meta information that doesn't appear in the actual content portion of your pages.

#### 10. Have patience.

Search engine robots, or crawlers, go out daily, weekly, and monthly to scour popular pages, follow links, and index new content. It may take time before your site shows up. Once it does, let it grow and check back with the previous nine hints.

## META Tags

“Meta” tags in HTML tell us what your page is about. The prefix “meta-“ means “information about” something. Metadata is information, or data about the data you’re talking about. Metadata for a book might be who wrote the book, what it’s about, when it was published, where it was published, and maybe even reviews about that book.

Meta tags in HTML appear in the <HEAD> section of your webpage. Here’s a typical example:

```
<meta http-equiv="content-type" content="text/html; charset=iso-8859-1" />

<meta name="description" content="John Hendron designs documents for print and hypertext, and works by day as an instructional technologist. In his website, he explores issues relating to education, Macintosh computers, and proffers a portfolio of his work." />

<meta name="keywords" content="technology, mac, hendron, education, design, web, print, hendron's digest" />

<meta name="author" content="John G. Hendron" />

<meta name="copyright" content="&copy;2003 John G. Hendron" />
```

There are two main types of meta tags: ones that use HTTP-EQUIV and those that use NAME. The first in the example above tells search engines and web servers which character-set I am using (International Standards Organization #8859-1). This means I’m writing in roman characters for languages like English. Since the web isn’t all in English, other standards are used for languages that use alternative characters, such as Japanese, Thai, or Russian.

Some search engines use the description in META tags for listing a site description in search results. The key to pleasing search engines is the use of words that appear also in the <BODY> of your page. Popular META tags exist, as seen above, for:

- page DESCRIPTION
- page KEYWORDS
- page AUTHOR
- and a page’s COPYRIGHT

By all means, these aren't the only META tags, but they are the primary tags in use today, and those that affect listings in search engines. There is also a ROBOT meta tag that can request the stop of indexing "NOFOLLOW" or "NOINDEX."

### **Pay for Visitors**

I'd be leaving something out if I didn't also mention the last, and often for individuals, the least-desirable method for getting traffic to your site: advertise!

Advertisements come in many sizes and shapes, but among the popular in the past year have been the Google AdSense text-based ads. AdSense ads cost money. Some websites, among them weblogs, host AdSense ads. When clicked, these earn website owners money. A similar program exists for Amazon.com. Hosting ads won't help your site ranking any, but it may pay for your own site advertising.

### **Conclusion**

Good books get readers. Good magazines earn subscriptions. Good content on the web isn't too different: good content attracts visitors to your site. Visitors who link to you add to your ranking on major search engines. Design your site(s) well, add quality content that people value, and you'll likely not worry about where folks can find you online. Keep content fresh, and if you need a real quick boost, consider an ad for a limited time.

A quiz for students interested in testing their assessment of the content in this document may use my quiz, available here:

<http://www.quia.com/tq/454894.html>

© 2005 by John G. Hendron. This guide is protected by a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 2.0 License. Details can be found online at: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/2.0/legalcode>

johnhendron@gmail.com | [www.johnhendron.net](http://www.johnhendron.net)