

BEST PRACTICE SUMMARY – Metatags

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This is a Technical Report on best practice for designing webpage metatags, to make webpages more visible to search engine crawlers. It is based on extensive research by leading researchers including Craven, Konia, Kritzinger, Sullivan, Weideman and others.

Every webpage has an “owner” – the person or organization responsible for providing the content. This “owner” should generate the **three metatags** as described below, and ensure that they are coded into the header section of the relevant webpage(s). Some search engine crawlers ignore some metatags, but it is considered good practice to include at least these three in any case.

1. GENERAL

- a. Webpages should be designed to be **user-friendly**, to make navigating them easy and effective.
- b. At the same time, webpages should be designed to be **visible**, or **search engine crawler friendly**. This will enable crawlers to easily find and index webpages, which in turn will open up the webpage to a wider audience through search engines.
- c. There are many ways in which a webpage can be altered to be visible. Only the easiest three aspects are covered here – coding the **TITLE**, **DESCRIPTION** and **KEYWORD** metatags properly.

2. DO's and DONT's

a. TITLE METATAG

This tag should be supplied as a **single English sentence**, very descriptive of what the webpage is about, grammatically correct and loaded with meaningful keywords. The TITLE metatag should be around 62 characters in length (including spaces). The bold italicized section below adds up to 60 characters. A TITLE tag can be longer than 62 characters, and the crawlers will read all of it, but the human user is likely to see only these first characters on a SERP.

It is important to write this metatag correctly, since it appears in at least three prominent places on the screen, under certain circumstances – see below.

- i. The TITLE metatag coding is invisible to the casual browser, since it is embedded in the coding (header section) as in Figure 1.

<title>World War 2 Timeline 1939-1945 - Worldwar-2.net</title>

Figure 1.

- ii. However, when this webpage is viewed by any user, the wording will be visible in the reverse bar, as well as in the Favourites section – see Figure 2.

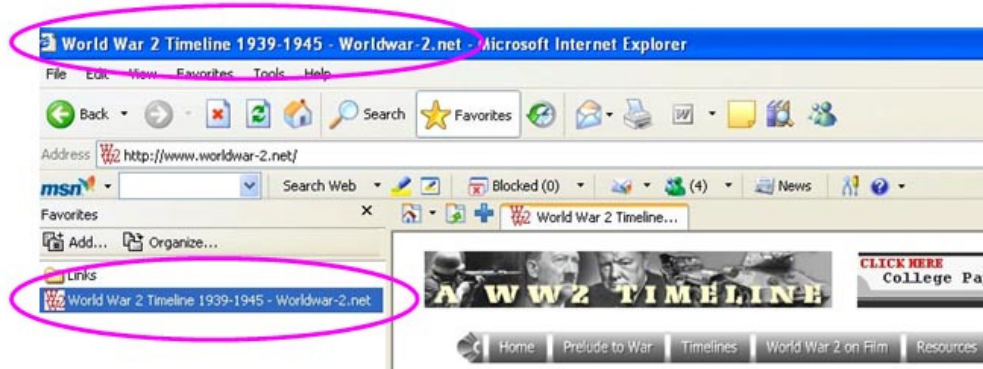


Figure 2.

- iii. Finally, if this webpage is displayed on for example a Google result page, the TITLE metatag will again be visible as the first line of the result summary – see the first ellipse in Figure 3.



Figure 3.

The three examples below meet most of the criteria for a well written TITLE metatag.

- iv. www.uvasys.com

<TITLE>Uvasys: Uvasys sulphur / sulfur dioxide generators control postharvest fungal decay in table grapes</TITLE>

- v. www.bmw.com

<TITLE>BMW automobiles - website of the BMW AG</TITLE>

- vi. www.cape-epic.com

<TITLE>Absa Cape Epic presented by Adidas | The Magical + Untamed African MTB Race</TITLE>

b. **DESCRIPTION METATAG**

This tag should be supplied as a **single English paragraph**, very descriptive of what the webpage is about, grammatically correct and loaded with meaningful keywords. It is therefore an extension of the TITLE metatag.

The DESCRIPTION metatag should be written in such a way that the most important keywords fit into the first 165 characters – most search engines will index all characters, but only display the first 165 on average.

- i. The DESCRIPTION metatag is invisible to the casual browser, since it is embedded in the coding (header section) similar to the TITLE example above.
- ii. If this webpage is displayed on for example a Google result page, the DESCRIPTION metatag will be visible as the summary below the title line – see the second ellipse in Figure 3.

The three examples below meet most of the criteria for a well written DESCRIPTION metatag.

iii. www.uvasys.com

<META name="DESCRIPTION" content="Uvasys Grape Guards are patented laminated plastic sulphur/sulfur dioxide generating pads /sheets which protect Table Grapes against Postharvest fungal decay, in particular Botrytis, for up to 4 months. Predictable and consistent Sulphur Dioxide emission means that grapes stored with Uvasys have maximum decay control combined with minimum sulphur dioxide damage. The excellent appearance of the stems and berries, combined with prolonged shelf life make Uvasys the choice of many leading European retailers. Both Dual and Slow release Uvasys sheets are available.">

iv. www.ananzi.co.za

<meta name="DESCRIPTION" content="Ananzi South Africa, search engine and web portal. Giving you access to the latest news, property, motoring, shopping, dating and job services.">

v. www.hetzner.co.za

<META name="DESCRIPTION" content="Hetzner is South Africa's largest specialist web hosting company. We provide reliable and robust web hosting solutions coupled with outstanding customer support. Trusted in Hosting">

c. **KEYWORD METATAG**

The KEYWORD metatag is not used by most search engines, but the human designer should use it as a library of keywords/key phrases. This tag should be supplied as a **series of keywords separated by spaces**. Overused and stop words must not be listed (eg. computer information system the that I, etc) Each keyword must be descriptive of some aspect of that particular webpage, and care must be taken to spell them correctly. The keywords selected should be repeated a number of times in the body text of the webpage, and should contain around a maximum of 100 keywords. There should be no repetition of keywords in the metatag itself, but different spellings (eg colour color) could be included.

The three examples below meet most of the criteria for a well written KEYWORD metatag.

i. www.bmw.com

<meta name="KEYWORDS" content="BMW international automobile automobiles vehicle vehicles cars car brand service interactive products insights driver driving pleasure 1 Series 3 Series 5 Series 6 Series 7 Series X3 X5 Z4 M3 M5 M6 pre-owned used configure compare models buy search dealer countries country">

ii. www.uvasys.com

<META name="KEYWORDS" content="uvasys grapetek tedmark sulphur dioxide table grapes botrytis postharvest laminated pad sheet generator plastic fungal decay litchi lychee grey mould mold fungus uvaspec sulphite laminated grape guard sodium metabisulphite protection preservation red globe south african thompsons residues">

iii. www.hetzner.co.za

<META name="KEYWORDS" content=" web hosting hosting in South Africa linux servers data centre co-location shared hosting dedicated hosting co-located hosting server hosting root server hosting managed hosting php mysql postgres domain registration">

3. REFERENCES

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