



iCommunication: Pumping Up the Visitors

By Francis Adams

Part II

How can we get more visitors to our web sites and how do we get more of the 90 percent who stay for 30 seconds or less to remain longer? There's no magic to it — just work. Let's employ things we all can do relatively easily.

Fresh Content

There's nothing worse than visiting a web site with nothing new. If I've been there before and nothing looks as if it was updated, I leave. Those hard-won visitors will stop visiting if you've nothing to offer. Why should they waste their time?

This is nothing less than the most important point in bringing in visitors. The search engines look for new content and the more updates there are, the more often the search engines visit. Nothing like having your web site picked up because you have news.

Give visitors something to look at once they get to the web site. Useful content is ultra-important for return visits and beginning interaction with the society. Whether it is society news, exhibits, digital philatelic studies, slide shows, or movies — it is all relevant content in a digital age.

When visiting a web site, I personally don't interact well if only a list of officers and an e-mail address is presented unless I'm really motivated. But, I might listen to an audio interview of the society

president or watch a video on cat stamps or the history of Wells Fargo. Wouldn't you?

Introduction

For those who must include an introductory section outlining the history of the organization and every development for the last 50 years, stop. Cut that text to a single paragraph no longer than four lines. Reading all that *touchy-feely* stuff is nice — for the writer.

Viewers want information on the subject they are searching for. They're not really interested in becoming friends until they know you and your organization are worth the time. Don't waste the screen real estate with meaningless diatribe. If it must be included, ensure keywords are included in the text.

A Linked Index

Give the visitor a sense of what the site contains with a meaningful index or table of contents with links to the various sections — right on the Home page. Don't make visitors dig because they won't.

The second reason is that the search engines will pick up on the list entries, section titles, using them as 'virtual keywords'. Indexing these adds to the value of the text on the page. Lastly, more value is given to the words used as links in a web page. Using these index words as links pushes them even higher in importance using the search engine's logic.

Domain Name

This is difficult once a site is built, but should receive thought

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Meta tags help get your site top billing.

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when first planning or building a site. The domain name can include the name of the society or theme of the organization, which are important keywords as well.

Metadata (meta tags)

This is not a scary word; it's simply the coded information within the web page that provides information to search engines. Metadata is contained in an area of the code called the *head*. Think of it like yourself. You have a head (where the brains are) and a body (where the content is). Web pages have the same pieces.

When looking at the page code, there should be a section at the top of the page named *head*. The word is in brackets — that's where the head starts. The head ends with the word in brackets, but with a slash character before the word and it looks like this:

```
<head>
metadata code stuff goes in here (see the following examples)
</head>
```

The information contained in the head provides instructions for things such as the following. In each case, an example of the code is included and you only need to change the italic sans serif text and copy and paste it into a web page head. Metatags typically are entered in the same order as they are listed below, one line under the other. Other meta tags exist, but these are the main ones that should be included on every web page.

Site and/or Page Descriptions

There should be a site and page description; one for the web site as a whole and one for each page. Each of these should be a paragraph of no more than 250–300 characters. The Home page will have the main description for the site, and each page description will include information about what is on that specific page.

So, write a few sentences describing the web site and its goals to start. This text is picked up by search engines and stored in their databases, where the engine later digs for information to display on a results page.

Did you ever notice that some search return pages have links with a name and funny characters that are confusing while others have real descriptions? Which link did you click on? The funny stuff you can't read or the one in English? The description text is displayed in the search results so the reader gets an idea of what's offered at the web site.

```
<meta name="description" content="Description of web site
and purpose" />
```

Page Name (Title)

When a web page appears on the computer screen, there's a name at the top of the window. This is the page name and it's horribly surprising how many pages do not have one. This is one of the most important text pieces a web site can have. Search engines put a lot of value on a page's name as it is indexed at the highest level. Omit it at your peril.

Review the page content and ensure the page name reflects the content. Again, this is an item contained in the metadata area.

```
<title>Name of the web site page</title>
```

In some instances, I put the page name and then the site name:

```
<title>Page Name — Web Site Name</title>
```

This reiterates the site name on every page, while maintaining unique page names that are descriptive of the page content.

Keywords

Seems everyone has heard of this term. From the keywords I've seen on some philatelic sites, every word you can think of that has anything to do with philately has been included. This is not a good idea as search engines are much smarter than they were years ago.

Keywords only work well if the word is also contained in the text on the page. That means different pages will have different keywords. Read the text on the page, pick out the most important things and add those keywords into the metadata area reserved for them. In some cases, they evaluate the words and actually penalize the rank of the site thinking the web master is trying to trick the engine to list the site in more places.

Something more to remember here is that most internet searchers are getting very savvy and no longer use a single word when searching for information. Keywords are now key phrases made up of usually three–four words. This type of search isolates the web pages returned in a search to those most meaningful. Include three–five phrases with a maximum character count of approximately 150 characters.

```
<meta name="keywords" content="keywords and/or keyword
phrases seperated by commas" />
```

Copyright

Include the copyright information in the head area so the search engine can find it should someone search on this criteria.

```
<meta name="copyright" content="&copy; year copyright holder" />
```

Language

Some searchers only wish to have results listed if a certain language is used.

```
<meta name="language" content="english" />
```

Names

On occasion, searches are conducted looking for specific authors or web masters.

```
<meta name="author" content="name of the webmaster" />
```

Descriptive Link Text

Do not use a link within the site that says 'read more' or 'click here'. Use descriptive text for such links. Example:

"The Red Herring New Year's issue will be on sale at the local post office."

Do not put a *read more here* link after the issue's name; use the title as the link. This style of linking is more valuable to the site as they appear in search results for that specific term.

Robots (Spiders)

Search engines send out inquiries in the form of small programs looking for new content and changes to web sites. These are called robots or spiders and they *crawl* the web comparing old and new content. When they find something new, they send it back to be indexed/updated. ►



Keeping Track of Former Covers

Editors who vary cover colors and designs from issue to issue are faced with keeping the look fresh while maintaining the publication's identity. A media manager, such as Adobe Bridge which is included in the Creative Suite series, is a handy tool for keeping track of these. I make a PDF of each issue that is kept in a common folder. When I open the folder in Bridge I can see thumbnails of past issues.

— Albert W. Starkweather

Telling robots to index a web site is a good practice. One can also tell the robot not to index the site, certain folders or even files if desired.

```
<meta name="robots" content="index or noindex, follow or nofollow" />
```

Site Map

As if an index on the Home page were not enough, add a site map page. The site map is essentially a table of contents. Every page on the site is listed along with a short description of the page and every entry is linked to the appropriate page. I sometimes have the content listed both alphabetically as well as by hierarchy.

Why do this if the same information is available in other places throughout the web site?

First, it's consolidated and easy for a visitor to see the entire site at a glance in different forms. Some searchers associate what they're looking for with alphabetical order, others see the pattern through the structure of hierarchy.

Second, these are internal links and we want as much interconnection as possible within the site.

Third, search engines love such pages as they're full of keywords and links.

Site Search

EDITOR'S NOTE: Visitors to the WU #30 Website and other sites I maintain will note inclusion of a Google search box that allows them to search the site or the internet. This is a valu-

able tool for large sites. The code may be copied from the *Page Source* view.

Link to Related Sites

Develop and use a *Linking Policy*. Links to every site on the web that contain the word 'stamp' is a useless exercise and will get your web site stuffed somewhere in the lower results pages. Link only to good web sites with relevant content to the organization's web site. Be selective and in some cases, absolutely strict in the interpretation of linking policy when asked for a reciprocal link, citing the linking policy if required.

Have as many sites link to the organization's web site as possible. Good web sites have a higher page rank in Google and consequently, bring higher value to the web sites they link to. Quantity is fine, but quality is much better in the case of incoming links.

Every page on the web site must have a link to the site's *Home* page. It's the most important page on the site and search engines will again add value to those links and your home page will increase in value, driving higher page rank.

Remember that internal links have value and including as much internal interlinking of pages as possible should be the goal with the home page receiving the main benefit.

Conclusion

Getting on the first page of Google's search results is the goal. We may not reach that goal quickly, but without implementing good practices, we never will. 