

Web page titles: Are you overlooking one of your best visitor magnets?

Overview:

Web page titles are often overlooked because they are not part of the visible page. The heading that you see above this paragraph is not what I'm talking about here - the web page title is actually somewhere else.

For example:

If you go to the jellyfish Creative, you will see a title header in the browser which is different to the main title in the page

Why page titles matter:

Although they don't display on the page, these web page titles have an important role to play. Think of them in the same way as the title on the jacket of a book in a bookshop. If readers aren't drawn to the title then the book will never get taken off the shelf and it won't matter how good the content is.

In web terms this relates to the way that search engines display the page title in their list of search results. The title has the vital job of attracting searchers attention and enticing them to follow the link to your site.

As an added bonus, most search engines also look for search terms in the title as well as in the visible text on the page. This means that a well written title can help improve your ranking, bringing your page nearer to the top of the list for your chosen keywords. Of course there are many other factors at work such as the page content, choice of keywords, meta tags and link popularity.

See how it works:

Try a quick search in Google for any subject and you will see how the resulting list shows page titles with words that matched your search picked out in bold. These are usually followed by excerpts from the page which also include your search term in bold. Sometimes these excerpts make little or no sense because they have been taken out of context. It is often the title alone that will influence you to follow the link or ignore it.

The lesson is this:

It is important for you or your copywriter to put as much effort into writing engaging titles for each of your main web pages as you put into writing any of the visible text on the page.

Tips for writing effective titles:

Keep to less than 60 characters (below 40, if possible), otherwise your title will be truncated by listings such as Google. Here's an example of a title that is too long:

- Welcome to the home page for the best online collection of...
- Build in your top keywords. For example:
- The Twice as Loud fringe theatre company
- Avoid unnecessary words that visitors are unlikely to search on such as 'welcome', 'home page' and sales talk such as 'the best' (see my first example).
- Always specify a title for every page otherwise they will be listed as:
 - Untitled
- Consider writing the titles without your company name and concentrate on the page content instead (that is what users are more likely to search for).
- In large web sites set a standard to make creating titles simple - for example use the main heading from the page followed by the section heading or web site name. Always put the information that is unique to that page first in case the titles become too long and are truncated.
- Try searching using likely search terms and see how your titles compare with the competition

You can write page titles in any word processor and then give them to your web designer or developer who will incorporate them into each page individually, or ensure that they are automatically generated if the pages are created dynamically.

Remember:

Make sure that your web pages have descriptive and engaging titles that will entice your ideal visitors into your web site.