

A Guide to Building a Search Engine Friendly Store with ProductCart



An Overview

It goes without saying that having good search engine rankings can dramatically increase the total number of visits to your online store, and therefore your sales. The purpose of this document is to provide you with a series of recommendations on how to make your ProductCart-powered store more search engine friendly.

Let's first talk about a search engine's ability to spider dynamic pages, such as the ASP pages created by ProductCart. Some people claim that search engines cannot spider dynamic pages. This is a myth. For example, Google specifically states the opposite (<http://www.google.com/webmasters/2.html>).

The reality is that in order not to crash the Web server that is hosting your store, the various search engines limit the number of dynamic pages that they crawl. For example, a search engine spider is not going to run a search on your store and crawl all the search results. Therefore, what you need to do is "help" search engines spider and index more of your dynamic pages.

The following paragraphs will focus on a number of things that you can do to help search engines better crawl and rank your store pages. Let's start with a look at Meta Tags. The "Title" tag is considered by many search engine optimization experts the most important piece of information given to the search engine about your page. ProductCart can dynamically generate unique "Title" tags for each dynamic page that it creates.

Use Dynamic Meta Tags

In the section of the [ProductCart User Guide](#) that talks about customizing the graphical interface of your store, we mentioned the files *pc/header.asp* and *pc/footer.asp*. If you haven't yet reviewed that chapter of the User Guide, we recommend you do it now, before proceeding with this document.

You can further customize the file *header.asp* to include simple ASP code that will generate page-specific Meta tags for your store.

Meta tags are a portion of a HTML page that is invisible when the page is viewed through a browser, but is used by search engine robots to classify and rank the web page according to their search algorithms. The most common and most important Meta tags are "title", "description", and "keywords".

ProductCart features code that can automatically generate these three Meta tags for you: different meta tags are generated depending on which page is loaded. For example, ProductCart will use the category name for the "title" tag of the page that is shown when customers browse that category. Similarly, ProductCart will use a portion of the product description to create the "description" Meta tag for the page that is shown when customers view details for a certain product on your store.

By using Meta tags that are specific to the content shown on the page, you will make your store more search engine friendly. Search engines don't like to see a bunch of pages that share the exact same title and description tags, for example. In fact, most search engine optimization experts agree that it is extremely important to have unique "Title" tags on your Web site pages.

It is up to you whether to use this feature or not. Let's review what happens in both scenarios.

- If you don't want to use this feature, simply include the "title", "description", and "keywords" Meta tags in the HEAD section of your *header.asp* file. These Meta tags will be used for any page dynamically generated by the shopping cart. For example, the page title will not change when different product details pages are shown. This solution is not search engine friendly, and therefore we do not recommend it.
- If you want to use this feature, then you will remove the "title", "description", and "keywords" tags from your *header.asp* as indicated in the instructions listed below. ProductCart will dynamically create different Meta tags for different shopping cart pages. For example, the page title for different categories and product pages will change based on the name of each category and product shown.

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To use this feature, follow these simple instructions:

- Make sure the file *include-metatags.asp* is located in the *pc* folder of your store. If you don't see the file there, you can download the latest version from the ProductCart Developer's Corner, which is located at: <http://www.earlyimpact.com/productcart/support/developers.asp>.

- Open the file *header.asp* using Notepad or your favorite HTML editor and place the following code above all other code:

```
<!--#include file="include-metatags.asp"-->
```

- Place the following code immediately after the opening <HEAD> tag:

```
<% GenerateMetaTags() %>
```

- Save *header.asp* and upload it to your Web server.

For example, the code for a basic version of *header.asp* would be altered as follows:

Original *header.asp* code:

```
<html>
<head>
<% Response.Buffer=True %>
<%
Set conlayout=Server.CreateObject("ADODB.Connection")
conlayout.Open scDSN
Set Rslayout = conlayout.Execute("Select * From layout Where layout.ID=2")
Set rslconObj = conlayout.Execute("Select * From icons WHERE id=1")
%>
<title>My store's graphical interface</title>
<meta name="description" content="A description of the content on this page">
<meta name="keywords" content="keyword, keyword, keyword, etc">
<meta name="robots" content="index, follow">
</head>
<body>
<table>
<tr>
<td>
```

Edited *header.asp* code (note the removal of the "title", "description", and "keywords" Meta tags and the addition of the new code, in blue):

```
<!--#include file="include-metatags.asp"-->
<html>
<head>
<% GenerateMetaTags() %>
<% Response.Buffer=True %>
<%
Set conlayout=Server.CreateObject("ADODB.Connection")
conlayout.Open scDSN
Set Rslayout = conlayout.Execute("Select * From layout Where layout.ID=2")
Set rslconObj = conlayout.Execute("Select * From icons WHERE id=1")
%>
<meta name="robots" content="index, follow">
</head>
<body>
```

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```
<table>
<tr>
<td>
```

- Now open the file *include-metatags.asp* using Notepad or an HTML editor. Save a backup copy of the original file before editing it, so that you can revert to the original version if your edited version creates any problems on your storefront.

Locate the following code in the file, and edit it as described below. In this document, we have highlighted in blue the areas of *include-metatags.asp* that you need to edit.

```
! *****
```

```
' Edit the content for the following constants
```

```
! *****
```

```
' The following is used as the page title when the page that is being loaded is not
' a product or category page. If it is a product or category page, the page title is
' the product name and category name respectively. Replace the ProductCart title
' shown below with your own.
```

```
Const DefaultTitle = "ProductCart shopping cart software"
```

```
' The following is used as the "Content" for the default "Keywords" meta tag. When the
' page is a product or category page, the product or category names are also added to
' the keywords. Replace the following keywords with your own.
```

```
Const DefaultKeywords = "shopping cart software, ecommerce software, asp shopping cart, shopping carts,
ecommerce solutions, e-commerce, ProductCart, Early Impact"
```

```
' The following is used as the "Content" for the default "Description" meta tag. When the
' page is a product or category page, the product or category descriptions replace the
' default category description.
```

```
Const DefaultDescription = "We offer shopping cart software to run ecommerce stores. Our shopping carts are
used by businesses to build and manage an online storefront."
```

```
! *****
```

```
' You should not need to edit the code after this point
```

```
! *****
```

- As the code indicates, you should not need to edit any other area of the file.
- If you are a proficient ASP programmer, you can choose to edit other sections of the file to further customize the type and number of meta tags dynamically generated by ProductCart. Please note that Early Impact does not provide technical support on customizations to ProductCart's ASP code.
- Save the edited version of *include-metatags.asp* and upload it to your server.
- Browse the store and pay attention to the page title shown by your browser to see if it properly changes as you browse your store catalog. If you are using Internet Explorer, select *Source* from the *View* menu to view the source code for the page. You can then see exactly what Meta tags ProductCart generated for the page.

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Using the “Store Map” Feature to Create Links to Your Catalog Pages

ProductCart v2.6 and above include a new feature that can give your customers an alternative way to browse your online store, and at the same time help you improve your search engine rankings.

The *Generate Store Map* feature consists of the ability to dynamically generate an HTML store map that will include a list of categories, their subcategories, and the products that they contain, organized in a ‘site map’ type of layout. This feature will help you create a static category tree to be used anywhere on your Web site.

When a static page links to a dynamic page, it is more likely that the dynamic page will be spidered by a search engine. For example, a search engine spider would not automatically *browse* your store by category. In other words, it would not locate your categories, subcategories, and product details pages unless there are links to them from other Web pages. Therefore, by linking to dynamic category and product pages from the *store map*, you will help search engine spiders locate and crawl your dynamic shopping cart pages.

Note that the HTML file that is generated when you use this feature is saved to the following location: `productcart/pc/catalog/StoreMap.html`. Make sure that the `catalog` folder has “write” permissions before using this feature or you will receive an error as ProductCart will not be able to write the file.

You can copy this file and place it anywhere on your Web site, or use portions of the code that it contains in other pages of your Web site. For example, you could create an HTML page called “store-map.html” and place it in the root directory (the top level directory) of your Web site. Make sure to link to it from your Web site navigation and especially from the home page to increase the relevancy of the page.

ProductCart allows you to format the *store map* using the following options.

- **General Options.** You can include or not include category and product descriptions (the short description is used in both cases).
- **Category Exclusion.** To improve performance (i.e. the time it takes ProductCart to generate the store map) or control the size of the page (i.e. the length of the store map), you can limit the amount of categories included in the store map. To do so, select the categories that you would like to exclude from the map generation process. Use the CTRL button to select multiple categories. If you don’t want to exclude any category, do not select any category in the selection field.

If your store contains a large number of categories, use this feature to create multiple store maps, rather than a very long page. You can then link the pages to each other using a simple navigation at the top and at the bottom of each page, for example.

Assume you have 100 categories in your store: you could create 4 store map pages, each with 25 categories and their respective products, then link each of them to the other three pages. You would end up with 4 static HTML pages that link to products and categories in your store.

Keep in mind that Google, for instance, recommends that you don’t have more than 100 links on a page (<http://www.google.com/webmasters/guidelines.html>). Although the process of creating multiple store map pages might be tedious, you should be able to quickly see measurable results in terms of the number of store pages that get indexed by Google and the other search engines.

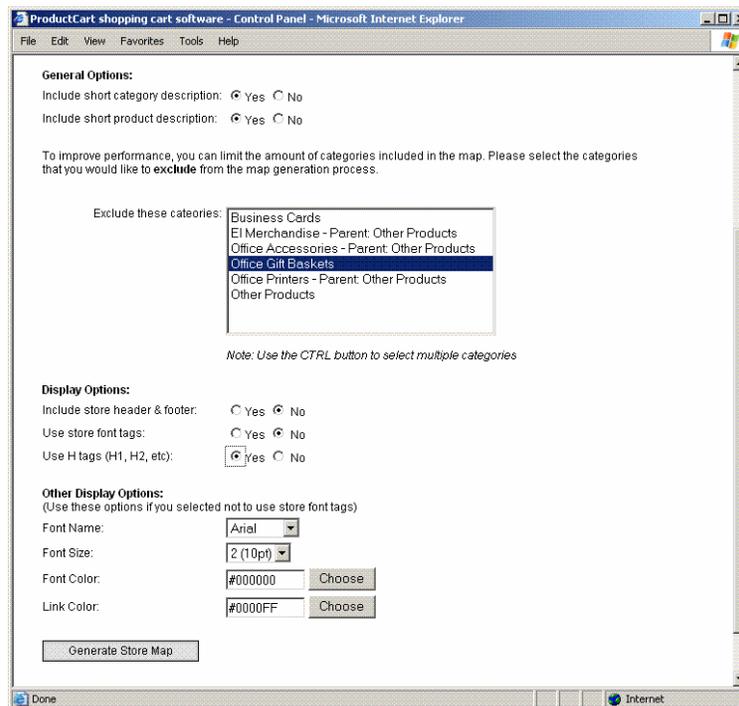
- **Display Options.** These options will help you partially customize the look of the page that ProductCart will generate.
 - **Include Header & Footer.** Include the store’s header & footer if you want to create a page that looks exactly like the rest of the store. Don’t include them if you want to generate a simpler HTML page, or if you plan to use portions of the code within another page on your Web site, or on another Web site.

If you receive an error when generating the store map with the header and footer, try generating the file without them. Code in your header and footer could be in conflict with

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- the code used by ProductCart to generate the file. You can copy and paste the HTML code that ProductCart generates (an HTML table) into any other page.
- **Use store font tags.** The same font type and colors set in the ProductCart's Display Settings area will be used on the store map as well.
 - **Use H tags (H1, H2, etc).** ProductCart will use the heading HTML tags in the store map. This can help make the page more relevant to a search engine spider. Generally speaking, H tags increase the relevancy of the text that they contain, when used properly.
 - **Other Display Options.** Use these font settings when you opt not to use the store font tags.



You can recreate the store map unlimited times. You can also create different store maps using different categories and subcategories, as mentioned above. However, remember that when you do so ProductCart will always overwrite the last store map it generated. Therefore, it is a good idea to save the file to your local system before generating a new store map, unless you are certain that you will not need the last store map that ProductCart created.

Here is an example of the same store map, generated from a fictitious print store. In the first example, the store map was generated without using the store's header & footer, and using custom font tags. In the second example, header and footer were included, and the store's default font tags were used.

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Moving mainIndex.asp to the Root Directory

If you plan to use ProductCart's default home page (mainIndex.asp) as your Web site's home page, it is a good idea to move the file to the root folder of your Web site, instead of redirecting to the page in the productcart/pc folder.

The steps to moving mainIndex.asp to your root directory are as follows:

- **Define a Web site.** On your local computer, create a Web site that has the same folder structure as your Web server. Refer to your favorite HTML editor's User Guide for information on how to create a Web site. If you are using Macromedia® Dreamweaver® this means that you need to define a site (*Sites > Manage Sites > New*).
- **Download files.** In your local Web site, create a folder called "pc" within a folder called "productcart". Use an FTP program to download the files header.asp and footer.asp from the "pc" folder located on your Web server to your local one.
- **Move header and footer.** Once you have defined a local Web site, your HTML editor can help you automatically recalculate links when you move a page from one folder to another. So open the Web site in your HTML editor, then open the files header.asp and footer.asp and resave both files in the root, which should be two levels up from the productcart/pc folder where they were originally located. Your HTML editor should recalculate the links for you so that there are no broken links in the files now that their location has changed (e.g. links to image files or other pages in the site).
- **Download "index.asp".** Download the file "index.asp" from the ProductCart Developer's Corner to the root of your local Web site. You can find a link to the file on the ProductCart Developer's Corner: look for the section on search engine friendliness. This is a special version of mainIndex.asp that has been restructured to work two levels above the original file. Other than that, the file is identical (i.e. it will load up to 12 featured products that you can specify using the Control Panel).
- **Upload to your root folder.** Upload the three files (index.asp, header.asp, and footer.asp) to your root folder using your favorite FTP program.
- **You're done!** Go to <http://www.yourStore.com/index.asp> to view the page and make sure that everything is loading properly. Remove other index pages (e.g. index.html, default.asp, etc.) that may also reside in the root. The page will now be your home page. Edit the Home Page URL in the ProductCart Control Panel (General Settings > Store Settings) to point it to this file.

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For example, here are links to the two pages on one of our ProductCart demo stores. Note that other than their location and file names, the pages are identical.

Default ProductCart home page:

<http://www.earlyimpact.com/productcart/demos/standard/productcart/pc/mainIndex.asp>

New home page:

<http://www.earlyimpact.com/productcart/demos/standard/index.asp>

If you don't want to follow the instructions above, but still plan to redirect your home page to ProductCart's default home page, then make sure to use what's called a "permanent redirect". In other words, you are telling the search engine that the page has been moved permanently to another location. Create a page called "index.asp" or "default.asp" with the following code:

```
<%@ Language=VBScript %>
<%
Response.Status="301 Moved Permanently"
Response.AddHeader "Location", "http://www.yourStore.com/productcart/pc/mainIndex.asp"
%>
```

General Tips & Tricks for Better Search Engine Rankings

Here are a few more tips and tricks to help you achieve higher search engine rankings with your ProductCart store page.

- Link to dynamic pages from static pages. As mentioned above, the likelihood that a dynamic page will be spidered and indexed is much greater when there are one or more static pages that link to it. (e.g. a static home page, a site map, a store map, content pages, etc.).
- Create a static home page for your store (e.g. www.myStore.com/index.html), then link to selected dynamic pages from it. For example, you could link to the featured products page (productcart/pc/mainIndex.asp), the top level category page (productcart/pc/viewCat.asp), selected product and category pages, etc. You can use the Control Panel to generate links to these pages, then copy and paste them into your static HTML pages (see the ProductCart User Guide for more information on using the *Generate Links* feature).
- If you would rather use a dynamic home page, move ProductCart's default home page (mainIndex.asp) to the root directory of your Web site, as described in the previous section.
- Create a static site map (e.g. www.myStore.com/sitemap.html), then link to selected dynamic pages from it. Search engines typically like finding a site map on a Web site. Make sure to link to the site map from your home page.
- Create a static store map, as described in the previous section. Link your "site map" to static content pages (see below) and selected dynamic pages (e.g. new arrivals, best sellers, featured products, etc.). Link your "store map" to dynamic product and category pages.
- Create content rich pages, and then link to dynamic category and product pages from them. Search engines love text-intensive pages that contain few links, a limited amount of code, and a lot of textual content. Don't stuff your content with keywords, but rather write useful articles about your products and services, your customer service policies, your company history, etc.

By doing so, you'll find yourself naturally including in your copy all sorts of keyword phrases that customers will use to find your Web site.

For instance, assume you are selling custom computers. You could create a series of pages that talk about the different types of computers you are selling and includes tips for your customers on which model they should choose depending on their needs. For example, you could create the page "how_to_choose_a_computer.html", and then link to selected dynamic category and product pages.

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Make these pages informative and simply laid out (few images, lots of text). Make sure to link to them from your site map, and from other pages in your Web site.

If you want to take your HTML pages to the next level in terms of search engine optimization, look for a reputable SEO company (here is a list <http://www.sempo.org/sempo-membership-directory.php>). Disregard any offer from any company that claims to be able to guarantee high rankings on any of the major search engines: there is absolutely no way to “guarantee” rankings, other than purchasing them via Pay-per-click or other paid-for placement programs, when available.