CREATIVE COMPOST

Where Great Marketing Ideas Grow

Seven SIMPLE Rules for Better Web Writing

News flash: writing for the web is not the same as writing for print!

Too often, marketers simply dump their brochure content online and call it a website. But, people read differently on the web. With a brochure, you can pretty much predict the linear path your reader will follow. However, web surfers "scan" more than read, jumping quickly from one piece of content to the next.

Online prospects are much more action-oriented. So, how can you keep their attention long enough to turn them into customers?

1. Know your reader. Copywriting basics still apply. The most effective writing —online or off — is hyper-focused on the specific needs of a clearly defined audience. Is she a high-powered urban executive nearing retirement? Or is he a work-at-home dad from the Midwest?

2. Sell with content. You may not be a publisher, but make no mistake: you're still selling content. Does your web content drive action? Does it add value to the online experience? Will it draw customers back on a regular basis? The abundance of recipes on the Williams-Sonoma website is not an accident. Neither are the marketing "how-to" articles we post at fahouryink.com.

3. Less is more. As fascinating as it may be, your website is not the place for a long-winded treatise on the history of widgets in America. Keep your headlines snappy and your paragraphs short. Vary the length of sentences, and use frequent subheads for a visual break.

4. It's all about me. Write from the point of view of the reader. Never underestimate the power of the word "you." Every sentence should direct browsers towards a solution…or even better, a purchase.

5. Write for how people search. Sounds simple, but you'd be amazed how few marketers actually write to maximize their appearance in search results. That means using the words your target readership is using. For example, someone looking for information on "melanoma treatment" might be more likely to use the phrase "cancer care." Before you start writing, map out the keywords you'll use in your content. Services like Wordtracker.com can help you discover all the possible keyword combinations for your business or service — many of which may never have occurred to you.

AND the survey says...

Marketers of unusual or niche-oriented offerings often run into trouble locating mailing lists to promote their wares. Survey data can be the ideal solution to this problem — helping you reach a highly vertical audience, or to gauge if a market for your product even exists.

Here's how it works: data gatherers distribute surveys to broad audiences across the U.S., via both postal mail and email. For example, I-com's *TargetSource* is a database of self-reported consumer responder information with 1,500 lifestyle, demographic, behavior, and interest selections. Data is drawn from a survey called *The Shopper's Voice*, which mails to 60 million households annually. Equifax (yep, the credit-report people) produces a similar product called *Datacap Survey of America*.

In general, survey questions can range from the basic (Do you own a cat?) to the more obscure (how much have you spent on cat toys within the past six months?)

Email campaigns made easy

With limited marketing budgets now the norm rather than the exception, companies are rushing to online marketing as a cheap way to get the word out. But, too many are running the risk of alienating customers with poorly designed and executed efforts bordering on spam.

Thanks to a new product launching later this month called iMail Mojo!, professional email marketing just got radically uncomplicated. The brainchild of veteran web designer Linda Carroll and email virtuoso Jane Tabachnick, iMail Mojo! is a turnkey email marketing "campaign in a box." The kit offers more than five dozen fully customizable graphic templates for ezines and email promotions, plus three information-packed ebooks to coach users on developing a successful campaign.

Email marketing requires graphics, copy, and knowledge of both technology and the "rules" of online marketing. Unfortunately, pulling together all the elements of a successful campaign is often beyond the grasp of many marketers without expensive consulting help.

iMail Mojo! requires no special software. Use any HTML editor, such as the free Netscape Composer, to populate templates with the content of your choice — company news, new product announcements, or special offers. Then, zip it out to your list via any of the popular delivery tools you may already be using, such as Constant Contact or Mailer Mailer.

iMail Mojo!'s accompanying ebooks include beginner and advanced tutorials for using the templates, plus tips for effective emailing and creating killer content. Users are also schooled on avoiding common pitfalls via an entertaining visit to the "Email Marketing Hall of Shame." Learn how even big-bucks marketers can neglect to include a response mechanism for their offers, or get canned as spam thanks to an unrecognizable sender address.

Source: iMailMojo.com

Interactivity without the inve$tment

Sure, animation and rich media attract customers to your website, but for most businesses they're simply not worth the price tag. New technology from Pulse lets you turn an ordinary still photo or head-shot into an animated 3-D salesperson, comparable to streaming video at a fraction of the cost.

In minutes, you can create virtual characters called "Veepers" to engage customers and extend the time they spend browsing your site. Small file sizes also make Veepers ideal for email messaging and viral campaigns. Best of all, Java output means no annoying plug-ins required. But once again, a Mac caveat: Pulse content is not compatible with Internet Explorer for Macintosh. You have to download Netscape Navigator to properly view content and create animations.

Customers as wildly diverse as Jose Cuervo and Harvard Medical School have taken advantage of Pulse's technology to enliven their online marketing, educational, customer service, and training initiatives. The business-related application is an extension of the company's Flowgo.com online greetings cards.

Source: pulse3d.com

Marketing Mishaps

Watch your &%^!* language!

MORRISON & FOERSTER would appear to be a savvy law firm with a snazzy tagline: "Lawyers for the global economy." So why would their new trade ads play up a nickname that shortens the firm's moniker to a term lawyers probably hear all too frequently? MoFo. Yep, say it out loud, then wonder if anyone else did so before deciding to use it as a branding tool?

PRICELINE'S new ads feature spokesman William Shatner in a witty Q&A segment called *Chat with Shat*. Last time we checked, wasn't "shat" the past tense of a naughty little scatological term?

Good web writing
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6. Give good headline. Headlines and subheads are the most important pieces of content on your site. Why?

- People scan web headlines, much as they do a newspaper. If it doesn't grab their interest, they're gone.

- Headings on your homepage can be used as links to direct customers to other content areas.

- They are often used as metadata, or what search engines use to list results.

Eight words seem to be the magic number in terms of headline length. Include your most important keywords, and cut the "filler" whenever possible: a, and, of, the.

7. Become a ruthless editor. It's always best to have someone other than the writer edit and proofread your content. If that's not possible, edit first for style and tone. Does copy speak in a consistent "voice" throughout? Then, look for places to cut. Is this information vitally necessary? Is there a shorter or simpler way to say it?

Leave the grammar and spell checks for last. Don't get lazy and rely on lame electronic spellcheckers. Professional proofreaders never read on-screen. Print out your content, and give it a final eyeballing before posting to ensure both technical and grammatical accuracy. Then, sit back and enjoy the compliments…and the sales.

Is it NEWS if nobody reports on it?

Sending out press releases can get discouraging if the media doesn't cover your story. What's worse is when your competitors are constantly getting all the ink. Clearly there's interest in your niche, but you're simply not reaching the right reporter or pushing the right buttons.

Sound familiar? Check out PR Leads — an online service that fields upwards of 100 requests a day from reporters looking for sources. Using keywords based on your areas of expertise, PR Leads routes highly targeted requests from reporters to you via email, including the reporter's contact info and a 100-word description of what they're looking for.

The service acts purely as a facilitator — you respond directly to the reporter. If you're not too experienced dealing with the press, PR Leads also offers coaching on how to respond effectively and increase your chances of getting interviewed. According to owner Dan Jamal, clients have been featured in publications ranging from top daily newspapers and consumer magazines to business-to-business publications in dozens of vertical markets.

A $495 annual subscription includes an unlimited number of leads based on your topics and keywords, plus "Master's Class" phone seminars, invitations to networking events, and feedback on your sample responses to reporters.

We're not suggesting you ditch your publicist or completely can your current efforts, but PR Leads might be worth a trial run to supplement them.

Source: PRLeads.com

Steal this idea!
Trade mags = inspiration central

Chances are, the challenges you're facing are not unique to your particular industry. Hurdles like supply chain woes, IT investments, and CRM strategies know no boundaries. So, why limit your reconnaissance to your own backyard?

Creative Compost has long championed the oft-ignored trade magazine as a rich source for inspiration. Most titles are free to

Survey says...
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If the information you need is not currently being gathered on any survey, you can add your own questions for a fee. Pricing is generally determined on a case-by-case basis. Some vendors charge by the line to "host" the question, while others determine rates by response, taking into consideration the penetration of the survey across the US. The bigger the penetration, the lower the cost.

Survey data can be used for a variety of reasons — to develop a list that may not be available elsewhere, to test the waters for a new product, or to incentivize users of a competitive product with a coupon or special offer. If you "sponsor" a survey question, you'll have first dibs on responders' information before it's made available for sale to the world at large. Not a bad way to build a targeted list.

Sources: equifaxmarketingservices.com, i-com.com

Steal this idea!
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qualified subscribers. Even better, several Internet sites now provide easy access to a broad expanse of vertical titles in specific industries. You'll also find publications that focus on general business tools like wireless technology, packaging, and the latest database trends.

In addition to scouting ideas for your own implementation, trade magazines are also an easy way to make yourself invaluable to key accounts. Educating yourself on trends in your customers' industries can be the fastest way to secure their loyalty for a lifetime.

Sources: magazines.com, freebizmag.com, tradepub.com

INSIDE: Seven rules for better web writing