

Writing your own web content



If you have decided to write your own content for your website and don't know where to start or have some existing content and want to improve it this article is for you.

Let's start with some good news. You really don't have to be a great creative writer to develop effective basic web content if you follow a few basic rules and apply a few simple tools and techniques.

The old rules don't apply

People (and search engines) view websites very differently to the way we read traditional printed media, so many of the 'normal' rules of writing don't apply. Your readers are likely to be browsing, and before going into any detail they will skim and scan selectively, reading in short bursts and grabbing whatever they need. Consequently you must think of writing content for websites as a separate task to writing for print.

Don't just re-use print copy for your website - especially not on your most important pages.

The good news is that you probably need to write less content than you might think, as in the world of informational or promotional web content, less is always more:

- Less content is more manageable
- Less content is easier for users to assimilate

- Less content is less expensive and time-consuming to create

What's it for?

Content must either contribute to your business objectives or help visitors fulfil the reason for their visit.

To reduce content whilst making it effective you must ensure that everything you write either:

Supports a business objective - such as promoting a charity, encouraging applications for membership of a club, establishing your capabilities, confirming your services are better than your competitors'.

Meets a goal for your users - providing them with the information they are seeking, helping them make informed decisions, or enabling them to make contact.

Spend a couple of hours writing a few pages or paragraphs of focussed, engaging and relevant content, rather than days writing page after page of text which may never be read in detail.

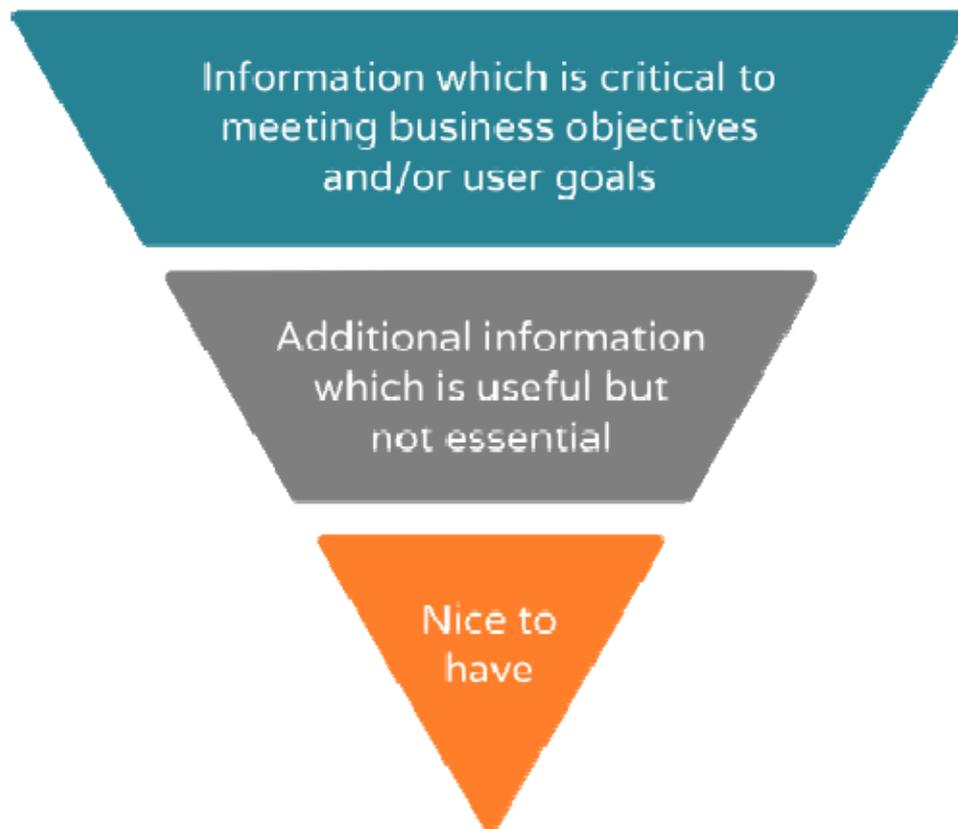
Focus on objectives

For each sentence, bullet point, paragraph or page of your web content, ask yourself:

- What do you aim to achieve? Do you want to inform, persuade, reassure or motivate?
- What outcome are you looking for? Are you inviting further engagement with your visitor?
- What course of action do you want them to take next? Respond to an offer, or sign-up for emails?
- Have you communicated your Unique Selling Point or built your credentials?
- How you want to influence your target audience in order to make your content purposeful?

The importance of front-loading your content

The inverted pyramid demonstrates that the opening paragraph should contain the most important information and answer the questions what? and why?



If your initial communication is effective, users can instantly understand what a page or paragraphs is about and decide if they want to read more.

You can follow an arresting opener with information which is helpful but not critical. Leave the least pertinent content for your concluding comments.

Keep it simple

Write clearly and simply. Don't be afraid to write a long sentence and then edit it by removing words which are unnecessary or superfluous, but don't cut out so much that you lose the meaning.

Keep your content in coherent chunks, make your point and then STOP WRITING.

Never create another web page for its own sake.

For actionable content, give your visitors clear direction and make it easy for them to complete the action you want them to take.

Make it scannable

Visitors typically scan web pages for headings, sub-headings, bulleted lists and links. Structure your content under headings and sub headings, with only one highest level heading per page, and your sub-headings nested correctly, with a sensible hierarchy. Ensure your headlines are attractive.

Include relevant keywords throughout your text without over-repeating them. Break paragraphs into bulleted lists - this makes them easier to scan, more succinct and less intimidating. Three to eight items in a list should be sufficient (more than this and the impact is reduced).

Essential style rules

1. Remember who your target market is and address them with a personable tone of voice (using "you" and "we"). You'll know how businesslike or informal to be. Be consistent.
2. Tell them what they need and why you can deliver it best.
3. Use active verbs and don't be negative be positive!
4. Ensure you reflect the unique aspects of your brand.
5. Write every page as if the user hasn't seen the rest of the site.

Some of the phrases to avoid are:

- "Welcome to ... "
- "On this page you will find ... "
- "Click here for information ... "

- “The links on this page will take you to ...”
- FAQs which aren't frequently asked, or are not even questions

Passing the 6Cs test

Before you have someone proof read your content your check every page and piece of content against the 6 Cs below.

- Is it clear?
- Is it compelling?
- Is it correct?
- Is it complete?
- Is it current?
- Who cares? (Who are your target audience and does the content meet their goals?)

Finally - Be ruthless - your visitors will!