

The WebXpress Web Content Guide

The saying goes that **content is king** on the Internet.

While design, usability and functionality are key in the production of an attractive, accessible website, content is the main incentive for a visitor to stay on a site and to revisit it time and again.

And, subject aside, some content commands and keeps visitor's attention and some doesn't. But when preparing content for use on the internet, remarkably few get it right for the medium.

This is primarily because most people don't realise that that **people read differently on the Web** than they do printed material. Looking at a screen is physically tiring so people tend to scan and won't to read word-for-word unless they are convinced they need a certain piece of information.

Therefore, simply copying and pasting your company brochure word-for-word is not necessarily a clever move. But, this does not mean that a web site needs to treat a subject superficially...

So, in the absence of employing a web copywriter to write your copy for you, we have created this guide to help you **maximise the potential of your online content**.

The guidelines and suggestions for structuring and writing content are aimed to help you put together copy for your web site that works for your customers as well as for you.

1) Perfecting home

The very first page a visitor usually comes to, the message and **impact** of the home page is very important. Think carefully about the introduction to the web site and to your business. Remember to keep copy **focussed to the needs of your customers, your unique selling point** and use plenty of 'keywords' relating to your services - this will also help with search engine rankings.

2) Keep it short and to the point

People read 25% fewer words per minute on a computer screen. Web writing should aim to be **50 percent shorter** and use simpler language than a printed story. Keep vocabulary and sentences **short, sharp and straight forward**. We suggest around **150 words per page** if possible.

3) Break it up!

Readers like manageable chunks of Information so **break up long, plain, tedious paragraphs** into one or two sentences.

4) Use bulleted lists

Though they demand succinct writing, bulleted lists are worth the trouble as they make scanning easy. Bulleted lists can provide an outline of what is contained in the text, and can contain hypertext links to new pages and anchors to sections on the page.

5) The Dos and the Don'ts of Long copy

If long copy is essential there are ways of making it acceptable to the reader.

It must be well written and include a good **introductory paragraph** - so if people do stop reading at least they have understood your main point.

Every time you move on to a new point include a **subheading**. This **breaks up the copy** and makes it easier to read. It also enables people to scan your piece to pick out the key points.

Split long pieces into **multiple pages**, each with a clearly **defined topic** and use **hypertext links** at the bottom of text to allow users to go to pages with more in depth information on topics that interest them.

Where there is lot of information to portray, it can be made accessible as **downloadable pdf documents**, without watering down the impact of your main piece. But always include a short summary to entice users before the download.

Important words and phrases can also be picked out using a **bolder font**.

6) Don't jargon

Don't presume that others will understand your company/industry jargon and acronyms.

While your site may be designed with a particular audience in mind, **do not make presumptions about their understanding**, or presume that other audiences will not also come across your site.

7) Proof

Get a second party to read through and proof check for **spelling and grammar mistakes**, and make sure any pictorial information is labelled correctly.

8) The Online Sell

To make words sell online you have grab attention and gain interest quickly. Use **powerful headlines** to help do this.

When planning your pages, **think about the audience(s)** the site is catering for or targeted at, and **your client's and potential client's needs**.

Talk about products and services in terms of the **solutions** they provide to problems your customers may have, and the unique **benefits** of investing in your product.

Use twice as many "you's" as you do "we's". This forces you to step into the readers' shoes and by doing that you are helping them relate to what you are saying.

Weave **testimonials** throughout your copy or use them to support case studies.

If possible **include value-added information** such as free information and advice. This will help you build relationships with potential customers and increase the chances they will visit your site again and buy from you.

If possible include a **powerful offer** that convinces visitors to contact you immediately or purchase online if your site is e-commerce.

Incite action in site visitors by sounding approachable and making sure it is easy for them to link to your email address and phone number or an enquiry form.

9) And finally....

When sending us content, please provide it in **electronic format** i.e. emailed or on disk.

If possible, please state the url of the page (if there is one at this stage) e.g. www.xxxx.co.uk/about_us.php and provide images with descriptive titles.