

The 10 commandments of writing Web content

If you want to attract—and keep—eyeballs on your website, follow these simple steps.

Writing content for the Web is completely different from writing content for print consumption. People read differently on a computer screen than they do on a piece of paper. Not only do computer monitors make it difficult to read for long periods of time, but people who use the Web tend to be especially impatient, looking for the information they want as quickly as possible.

1. Keep your headlines clear and catchy. The headline is often times the only thing a reader will first see from your Web content. Maybe they came across a link to a blog post on their Twitter feed, or maybe they're viewing your headline in the search engine results. Your headline needs to be clear, memorable, and to the point. Put the most important information at the lead of the headline.

2. Get to the point. Web users typically give a new website eight seconds to capture their attention. If they can't find what they're looking for by then, they back out of the site. This means you need to get right to the point in your Web content. No long, meandering intros. Cut to the chase so the reader knows he's in the right place.

3. Link to resources for further information. It's always a good idea to include links within your content. This is a good way to help readers get more information on a particular subject, and keeps them moving forward on your website.

4. Keep paragraphs to a few short sentences. Online readers are easily overwhelmed. Whenever they see a huge block of text, they usually get scared away. Keep your paragraphs to just a few short sentences so that it's easy to scan.

5. Use bullet points and numbered lists. People tend to scan content online rather than read it word for word. By using bulleted or numbered lists, you help to make your content quick and easy to scan. Consider this post. If you wanted to, you could scan over it in maybe 15 seconds and get the key information from it.

6. Include subheads to break things up. Subheads are useful for making your content easier to scan, and they help to keep your copy more organized.

7. Optimize your content for relevant keywords. No matter what type of Web content you're writing, you need to remember that it's going to be indexed by the search engines. The more search traffic you can drive to it, the better. So, always optimize your content for the right keywords.

8. Write like you talk. The Web tends to be a more conversational, less formal medium of sharing information than most print communication. With that in mind, it's important that you write content that has a personality and engages the reader. Simply put, just write like you talk. No need to try to dress your content up or make it more complicated than it needs to be.

9. Double check everything. Whenever you put something online, it's going to be up there forever. The Internet has a long memory. So before you publish anything, double check the facts, and make sure there aren't any typos.

10. Encourage feedback. The Internet is all about interaction. Now, readers have just as much of a voice as the authors. And that's a good thing. Just make sure you're encouraging your readers to give feedback.