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Copywriting

*Successful writing for design,
advertising, and marketing*

Second Edition

Writing for the digital environment

The quality of content on the Internet is one of the most important elements of the digital revolution. Information flows digitally between all of us, day and night, and the only challenge is making real sense of any of it, which is where you come in. Get the copy right at the start and the communication will make sense to your audience. Most digital content is generated by organizations, but increasingly individuals are using the digital airwaves to publicize their messages, and user-generated content from social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube is beginning to dominate the Internet. Social commentary from Twitter microblogs has influenced behavior on a large scale. As social networking sites emerge as sales channels in their own right, social media has become embedded in consumers' lives.

It's direct marketing, Jim, but not as we know it

The development of interactive websites has had to keep pace with the emergence of new handheld digital devices such as **smartphones** and **tablets**. The number of shoppers accessing retailing websites from their mobile handsets is increasing. A new mobile commerce—or “m-commerce”—is emerging, with mobile-optimized websites that can be read on every type of digital device. Websites remain a powerful interactive medium, and as a copywriter, the content you create has to be informative, clear, and compelling.

“This is a medium that doesn't require campaigners to jump through hoops doing publicity stunts, or depend on the good will of an editor to get their message across.”

Naomi Klein, No Logo

Copywriters usually influence the planning and structuring of a website (which is separate from actually building a site) because the content has to be linked together carefully so that visitors can navigate in whichever way they choose. The Internet offers huge opportunities for creativity, but it is not the place to go overboard with your copy. You need to be even more controlled because the digital environment can be so unstructured compared with print.

Websites are a form of direct marketing, in that they can reach directly into the audience's world to inform, guide, and sell to them, but they have one fundamental quality that shapes their every aspect: they are an interactive medium. All digital communications share similar properties and the guidance for writing for the Internet applies in many ways to the other digital media you may work on.

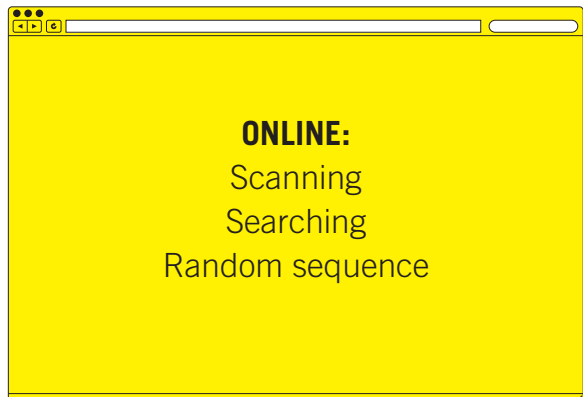
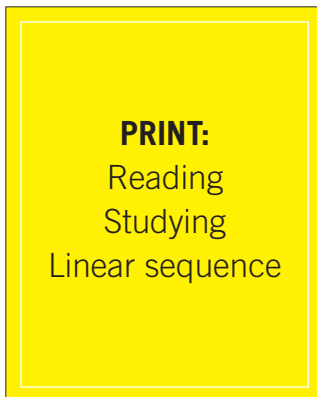
In the absence of the boundaries that you have with print, you must set yourself clear objectives so that the content you're working with doesn't run away with you. Thorough preparation and planning is essential and, as with other formats, simplicity is the key.

Interactivity presents a whole new world of opportunities for communication in compelling and relevant ways, but if you don't do the hard work of preparing and presenting the content clearly you will lose your audience before they have even started.

Your visitors don't read, they scan

People don't read online, they scan, searching for the material they entered the site to find. Rather than read your main headline, opening paragraph, and body copy in sequence, they will search for their key words in your text. It is only when they arrive at their destination that they will require full information and detail, which is often best provided in the form of a separate, downloadable PDF or similar document.

The differences between reading print and reading online



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Highlighting our success

Legal & General makes financial security easier to achieve for millions of people. To many retired people, the pension fund they have built up over the years is what they now depend on.

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At every stage of life, people seek financial security and protection for themselves, their loved ones and their possessions.

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Did you know?

- The Legal & General Group, established in 1836, is one of the UK's leading financial services companies.
- We are one of the UK's top 50 companies in the FTSE 100 index.
- Over 5.75 million people rely on us for life assurance, pensions, investments and general insurance plans.
- The Legal & General Group is responsible for investing over £257 billion worldwide (as at 30 June 2007) on behalf of investors, policyholders and institutions.
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This site doesn't pull any punches: it's corporate and controlled. It uses fresh and concise copy that gets straight to the point, highlights the benefits to the reader, and makes sense—which is saying a lot in the financial services field. This quickly builds a sense of trust, so that the visitor will have a positive experience with the brand.

The screenshot shows the Energy Saving Trust website with the URL <http://www.energysavingtrust.org.uk>. The page features a blue header with navigation links and a search bar. The main content area is titled "Top five green New Year resolutions" and includes a list of resolutions with detailed advice for each. A sidebar on the left contains navigation menus, and a right sidebar contains utility links like "Page tools" and "Register for updates".

Navigation: Corporate, Working Professionals, Transport & Business, Community Projects, Schools, Resources, Media, Contact Us, Jobs

Search: Search

energy saving trust

Home | Year impact on climate change | What can I do today? | Energy saving products | Home improvements | Generate your own energy | Help and support

You are here: Home > Resources > Features > Features archive > Top five green New Year resolutions

Resources | Case Studies | Daily news | Features | Features archive | Publications | Related websites | Useful statistics | Watch our video content | Get a free home energy report | Search for grants and offers

ACT ON CO₂

Top five green New Year resolutions

This New Year, why not green your resolutions? Read our five steps to a more energy efficient lifestyle

Resolution #1: Cut down on water wastage

Water is a precious resource that shouldn't be wasted. Wasting water also wastes energy, because it takes large amounts of energy to clean and to pump it through the mains system to your home, and to heat it too.

- Take a shower instead of a bath. A typical bath can use over 100 litres of water, while a shower uses only about a third of that
- Buy a water butt to collect rainwater for the garden
- Put a water displacement device in your toilet cistern. This reduces the amount of water your cistern holds, and thus the amount of water used for each flush
- Fix drips. A dripping tap wastes about 10 litres of water a day - while a new washer costs just a few pence and can be fixed in minutes!

Resolution #2: Make your computer energy smart

Computers use large amounts of energy and are often left on at night or when not being used. But there are plenty of ways to reduce this wastage considerably:

- Switch your computer off at work when you go home, and switch off your home computer when you go to bed. Don't forget to switch off the monitor too
- Replace your traditional monitor with a newer flat screen LCD monitor. These use around a third less electricity
- Use the power saving features of your computer to switch off your computer's hard disk and monitor after they have been idle for 15 minutes. Over a year this will save around 8kg of carbon dioxide (CO₂) - enough to fill 325 party balloons - over your one-hour lunch break alone, or more if you work away from your computer at times.

Resolution #3: Commit to saving 38 per cent

Resolutions are all about committing yourself to make a commitment to save energy. If we all save just 20% of the energy we use every day, together we can help fight climate change. [Make your commitment today](#)

Resolution #4: Aim for greener journeys

Every day millions of people drive to work, using up energy and producing enormous amounts of CO₂. But there are a number of ways you can reduce this:

- Start a [carpool scheme](#) at your workplace by putting up a 18-share notice board and encouraging colleagues to get involved!
- Organise your work so you can work from home one day a week but bear in mind that during the winter if you need to heat your home, you may end up generating more CO₂ emissions than if you went to work
- Think cycling if you live within cycling distance of your workplace, this commuting by bike is a healthy alternative to driving. If you are an employee

Page tools: End this page, Print this page, Bookmark this page, Rate this page, Average rating: 4 - Good

Register for updates: For regular email updates please submit your email address below. Email address: [input field] [Submit]

How did you find us? Please select an answer: [SELECT]

Help and advice: Call 0800 512 012 for free, independent and local energy saving advice. Click here to request a call back from your local advice centre.

Latest News: UK, Poland push for international renewable targets (10 June 2008), EDF launches renewables joint venture (10 June 2008)

Offering plenty of material and clear navigation, this information-resource website presents each item clearly and concisely. The content leads with the key facts and provides the detail in a format that can be scanned and searched, and is easy to absorb when read online.

For the rest of the site you should use a brief, punchy, and energetic style that presents your copy as concise soundbites of quality information. Short sentences and paragraphs, bullet-pointed lists, and clear titles and subtitles are all hard-working techniques for breaking up copy into easily digestible pieces.

An Internet site presents visitors with options. As the writer (along with the other team members) you identify and clarify those options, while the users choose where they start, where they go to next, and where they finish. You have to present the information along the way in self-contained pieces that can be accessed in any order and still make perfect and compelling sense.

You are the tour guide to the site

You may be writing for an existing website (or similar digital format) or you may be creating a site from scratch. In both cases as the writer you are assuming the role of the tour guide to the site. It is your role to draw in the visitors and hold their limited attention span for as long as possible before they click off to another site. How you do this depends on what your audience expects from the site, and what you feel will work best. Whichever approach you take, you must be consistent with everything you write for the site.

You are providing the options to the visitor, and the way you create and present the links between sections and pages on your site is one of the most important elements of your copywriting. In the digital environment you are responsible for prioritizing the key information and steering the flow of your “story,” but you have little control over the sequence in which visitors will decide to access this.

Instead, you have to ensure that the right links are in place at each point on the site where the visitor may decide to take a diversion. Give the users full control of how the content can be accessed and used, and anticipate their needs as far as possible so that you can guide them to the places you want them to visit. Brainstorm all of the options and prioritize them, and then make sure that they are expressed clearly.

It is vital to work with the site designers and programmers, at least in terms of understanding what your options and restrictions are. Does the programming language they are using allow you to include lots of links? Does the graphic interface of the site present any restrictions in terms of the number or location of links? Which links could be included in the live copy as well as in hot buttons? Do the programmers have any solutions of their own that will help you with the structuring of the site and the way pages will link? You are part of a project team, whether in-house or freelance, and if you haven't met the key people on the team try asking if this is possible—it is likely to open up a whole new range of possibilities.

“The job of writing web copy, especially in small- to medium-sized enterprises, often falls to marketing, or in some cases IT staff. Even larger companies employ or outsource copywriters with insufficient online experience. The result is long pages of text, which do not appreciate how users read the web or help them find what they want.”

Peter Burns
Top 100 Internet Mistakes You
Can't Afford To Make

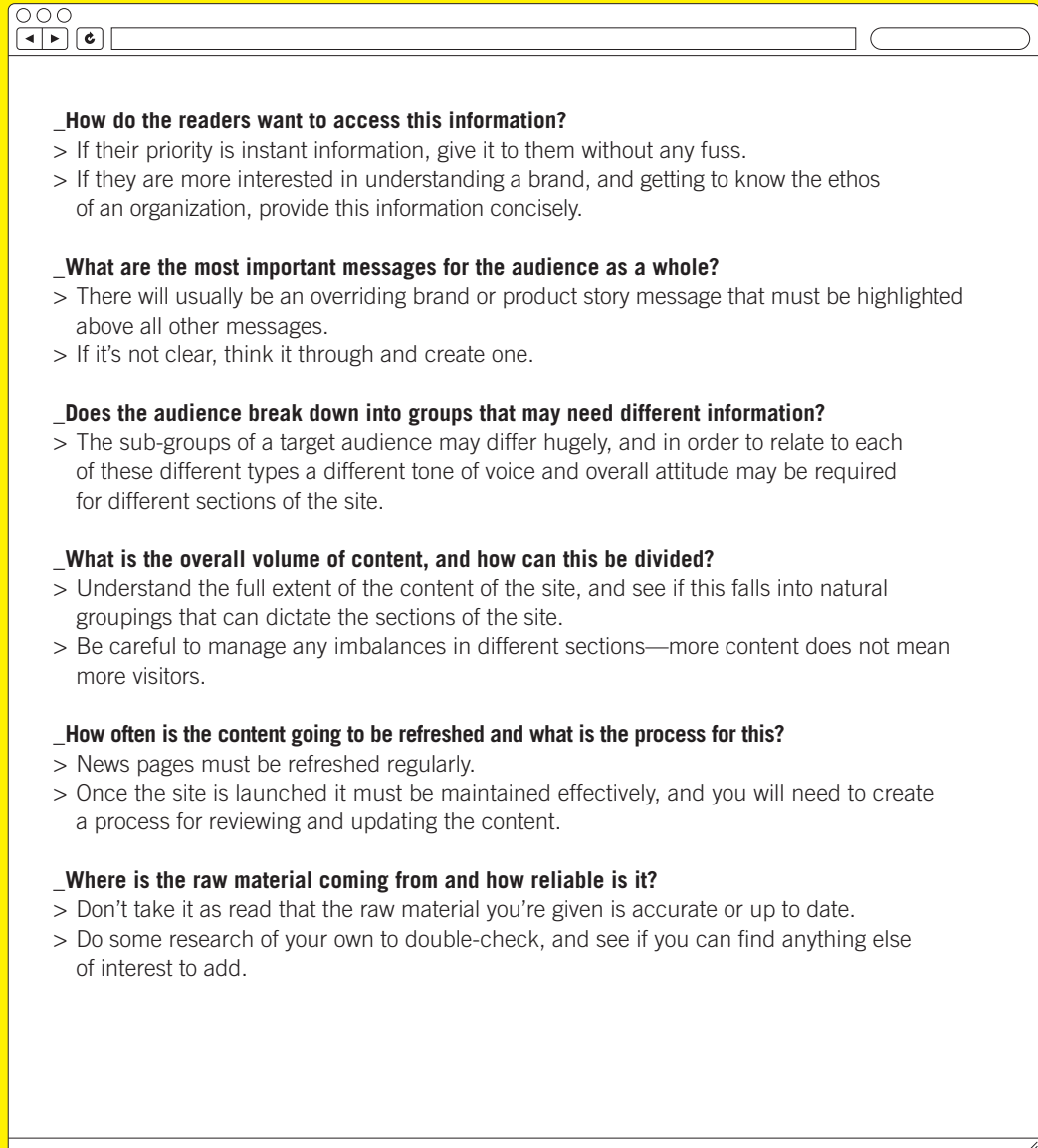
Preparation is the key to success

With website projects it is essential that you have established a coherent plan for all of the content before you start.

Having taken a thorough brief, your impressions of the target audience will be your starting point, just as with every other copywriting project. Take the time to analyze and process the raw material you are working with, and conduct some original research of your own to add detail and gain a better insight into the target audience, marketplace, and your client's strategy. Retain only the most pertinent information and collate this material into logical sections.

The Web is a very visual environment, so be sure that your copy solutions will complement all of the graphical elements that will be used. How can

Checklist: Planning the content for a website



The image shows a browser window with a white background and a grey border. At the top left, there are three small circles representing window control buttons. Below them is a navigation bar with a back arrow, a forward arrow, and a refresh icon. To the right of these icons is a search bar with a magnifying glass icon. The main content area of the browser contains a checklist with six items, each starting with an underscore and a bolded question. Each item is followed by two bullet points starting with a greater-than sign (>).

- _How do the readers want to access this information?**
 - > If their priority is instant information, give it to them without any fuss.
 - > If they are more interested in understanding a brand, and getting to know the ethos of an organization, provide this information concisely.
- _What are the most important messages for the audience as a whole?**
 - > There will usually be an overriding brand or product story message that must be highlighted above all other messages.
 - > If it's not clear, think it through and create one.
- _Does the audience break down into groups that may need different information?**
 - > The sub-groups of a target audience may differ hugely, and in order to relate to each of these different types a different tone of voice and overall attitude may be required for different sections of the site.
- _What is the overall volume of content, and how can this be divided?**
 - > Understand the full extent of the content of the site, and see if this falls into natural groupings that can dictate the sections of the site.
 - > Be careful to manage any imbalances in different sections—more content does not mean more visitors.
- _How often is the content going to be refreshed and what is the process for this?**
 - > News pages must be refreshed regularly.
 - > Once the site is launched it must be maintained effectively, and you will need to create a process for reviewing and updating the content.
- _Where is the raw material coming from and how reliable is it?**
 - > Don't take it as read that the raw material you're given is accurate or up to date.
 - > Do some research of your own to double-check, and see if you can find anything else of interest to add.

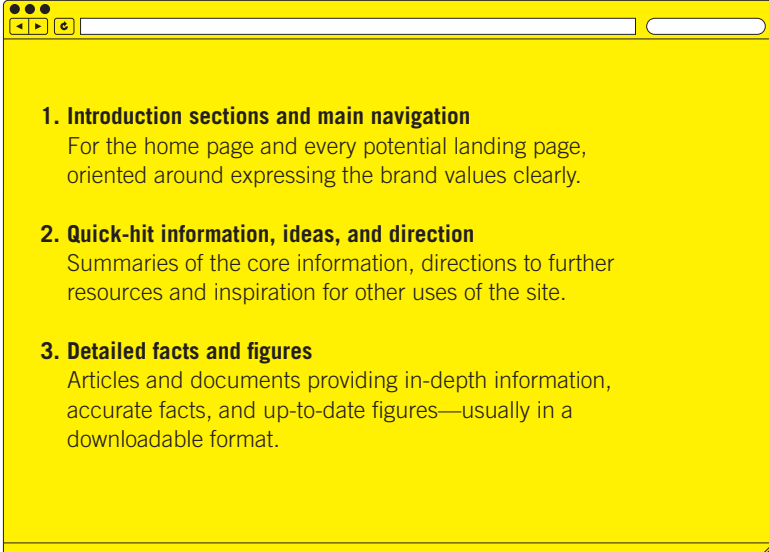
“A short saying often contains much wisdom.”

Sophocles

illustration, photography, charts, diagrams, and graphics be incorporated, how can your copy enhance these, and how much breathing space does this leave for the written messages? Your copy must be concise and clear, but you are allowed to present information in great detail if this is appropriate.

Before you begin planning, write a short summary of the site’s intended role, including who it is catering for, what it aims to provide them with, and what the overall objective of the project is. Keep this to a single sheet of paper if you can. This is to help you and the designers clarify the overriding purpose of the site and remain focused on this at all times. Try jotting down some rough headlines and subheaders to get a feel for the style and tone of voice that you will adopt.

The three layers of website content

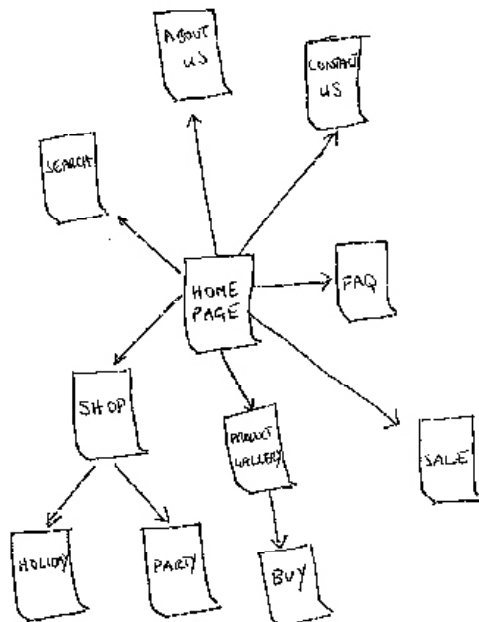


1. Introduction sections and main navigation
For the home page and every potential landing page, oriented around expressing the brand values clearly.

2. Quick-hit information, ideas, and direction
Summaries of the core information, directions to further resources and inspiration for other uses of the site.

3. Detailed facts and figures
Articles and documents providing in-depth information, accurate facts, and up-to-date figures—usually in a downloadable format.

Sketching out your site plan



Getting started: Sketch out your website plan

You will need to plan out what pages will be on your website, how they might be grouped, and how users will easily find their way around.

1. Grab some large pieces of paper and some colored pens or pencils.
2. Draw a box near the top and label it “Home page.” Keep boxes thumbnail size so you have room to add comments or notes.
3. Under the home page box, create a box for every major section of your site: for example, “About us,” “Products,” “Buy,” and “Search.” These will become your **landing pages**, which will in turn lead to further information in each section.
4. Draw lines between each section box and the home page to indicate that they should be linked from the home page. Work quickly and don’t worry about the details of your design.
5. Under each section, add boxes for additional pages you would like in that section and draw lines from those boxes to the section box.
6. Give your pages names—make sure you use names which help users find their way around your website. Remember that your page names will affect how easily search engines can find your site.
7. Once you have mapped out all the pages and their main links, take a different colored pen or pencil and start to draw out the peripheral links that visitors will find between the pages of the site.
8. Continue creating boxes to represent Web pages and drawing lines to connect them to other pages until you have every page you want on your website listed. Don’t forget to include any access and information pages that may be needed: for example, “Login,” “Site map,” “Frequently asked questions (FAQ),” and “Help.”
9. If you wish, you can start sketching in more detail, showing how the user will navigate the site. You could use the label “Start” to mark entry points (where users arrive at the site), and add arrows to show how users might move around the site.

Send a clean version of your sketch map to the programmer so that they can check viability and suggest ways to maximize user experience by taking users directly to what they’re most likely to want in the fewest possible steps.

Scanners don't like complex concepts

Don't forget, your readers will not be reading your copy fully; they will be scanning for the key words that will take them where they need to go. This does not absolve you from your responsibility to incorporate all of your copywriting techniques (promise–deliver, intrigue, benefit-led propositions, and so on) for holding the visitors' interest, keeping them entertained, and encouraging them to visit frequently.

More than any other, digital formats require you to pare your copy to the bone, which can be a very satisfying process. There is no room to go into great detail on a thought-provoking concept—your priority is to deliver maximum understanding coupled with very clear navigation, and the fewer words you need to do this the better. Distilling a complex message into its purest essence is one of the most rewarding copywriting challenges.

Keep the main information to the start of your headers, opening paragraphs, and body copy, and use generic industry terms in full. This will help your readers to scan your copy for the information they require.

Gathering together the available material for the content is a core part of your role as the copywriter, but the time and effort required to do this thoroughly is often underestimated. The visitor will see only one page at a time, and rarely understands how much work it takes to create the entire site. When you plan the site, do a separate plan for the writing time required.

You will gather a lot of your content through the briefing process, where you will be able to agree the context, detail, and priorities for the site. You will be able to add more detail and context to this by conducting your own research, but there may still be a lot more information missing. Depending on the nature of the site, you may have to interview people within the client business and arrange for photography at the same time. It takes time to

Techniques for editing Web copy

Collate the information gathered from the client.

Conduct some original research to add detail and context.

Pull this together and organize into clear sections.

Create a site plan to show how the sections link.

Segregate your raw material into these sections.

Draft the copy in full for each section.

Revisit the completed copy and cut out any unnecessary words or phrases.

Check for consistency throughout and tighten if possible.

Write the copy for headers, links, and hot buttons.

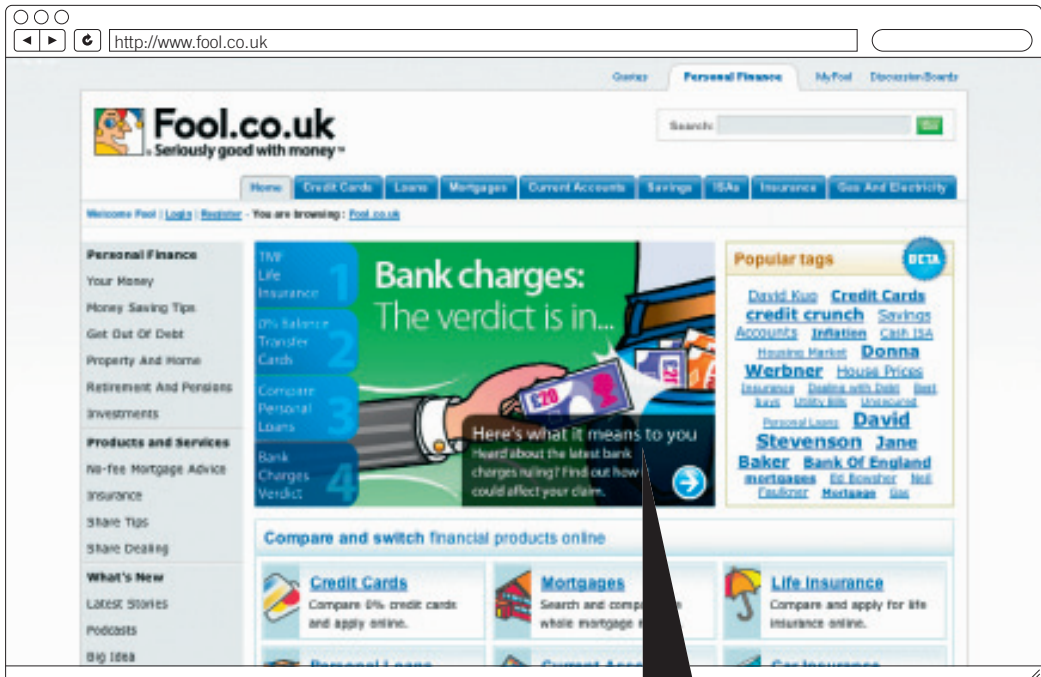
*“Good things, when short,
are twice as good.”*

Baltasar Gracián

arrange an appointment, conduct the interview, write it up, and get it approved by the relevant signatories. Plan ahead and don't leave this to the last minute.

Knowing that you will revisit your copy as an editor, you can create the first draft in a looser form than you would use if it were to be finished copy. In fact, it is wrong to craft finished copy at too early a stage. At this stage you should view this more as taking comprehensive notes for yourself. If you write the copy for the entire site in this way, you will break the back of the project as well as gain a thorough understanding of how the copy will fit into the overall feel of the site. This will be very helpful when you return to cut the copy down, as you will have a complete overview that will guide your decisions about where to cut back and how far you can go, and ensure that you have a good balance of information across the site.

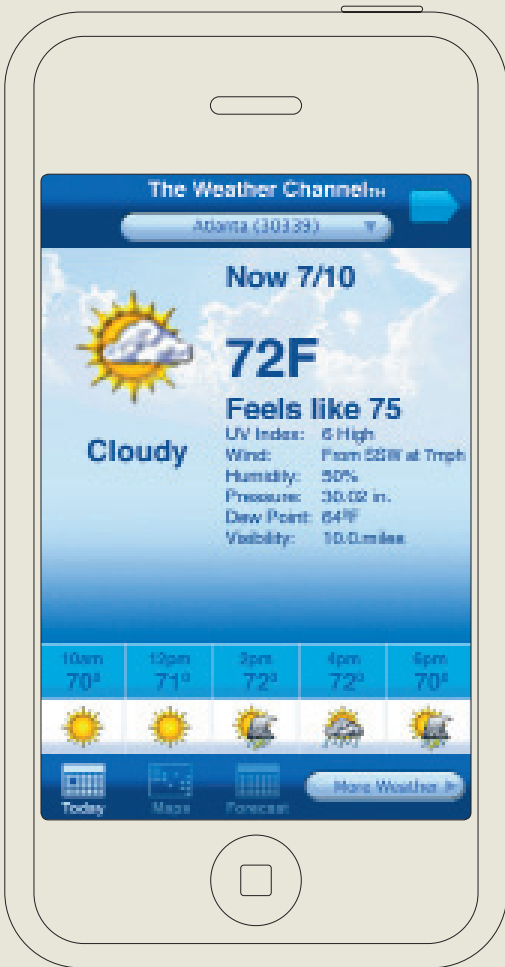
When revisiting the copy to edit it you can experiment. Keep a copy of the original text so that you can return to it if required, and then sharpen your scalpel—you're about to perform major surgery. Wherever you spot repetition you can combine messages. Wherever a conversational tone is spotted you can cut out the chat to leave the core message. Wherever long words are used you can replace them with short ones. Keep cutting and cutting, being careful not to lose any of your core content. Once you've filleted your original copy down to the bare minimum you may find that it is far more powerful, punchy, and concise.



There is an abundance of advice about money in newspapers and magazines, so why go to this website? Maybe because it speaks to you in an open and honest way, and is not frightened of having some fun at the same time as being brutally accurate: a powerful and compelling combination.

Here's what it means to you
Heard about the latest bank charges ruling? Find out how it could affect your claim.

“We’re working on the ‘micro-micro-micro’ scale here.”



Interview: Mark Santus, Romeo Empire Design

Mark is a managing director of New York's Romeo Empire Design, and specializes in creating digital content for their corporate clients, who include Trump National Golf Clubs and AT&T. The Romeo group designed a smartphone graphical user interface for The Weather Channel. Mark explains how he works with copy in the digital environment.

My background is marketing, but I've been doing this for a long time. I think like a graphic designer, in short bursts of words; as a writer I have to be to the point, avoid jargon, and make it "everyman." As in signage systems we have to maintain consistency. I've developed a brief way of communicating. Writing copy descriptors under graphic icons just comes naturally to me.

As well as full applications, we do a lot of banner ads. We are tightly restricted by current limitations of technology. We can go to a maximum of four kilobytes per file and graphics eat up most of this. It's color that uses most memory, so we tend to use just one or two. The question is how much space to allocate to copy and how much to the image. There is almost nothing to work with.

We're trying to get across the most information through the advertisement; visual and contextual components fight for space within tight limitations. We're working on the "micro-micro-micro" scale here. Copy requirement in a digital environment is often very basic as there is so little space, and our designers usually write the interface copy.

There are readability issues, and the question of how much space we have available. There is always a strong graphic element, but the copy gives description to an advertisement. In the GUI (Graphical User Interface) environment of handheld applications we have a bit more breathing room and elaborate with copy a bit more. The GUI is quite big, but we tend to use two colors and only a few pixels so it remains clearly readable, and our designers may hand-render a font for clarity. Microsites give us much more room.

We designed and wrote The Weather Channel site to operate on the iPhone. It can't be accessed through a desktop browser. We always design to the technical constraints of the format, and in this case we could really only describe and explain the functional points. A designer will ask "what is the best thing to call this button?" and the answer isn't always exactly clear! It offers a two-week forecast

of the "temperature," what it will "feel like," and how this progresses through a day.

We already use these terminologies on The Weather Channel, which provides the information. Blackberry users want functionality. It's a tool, and content on the Blackberry originates in need. The application is pushed by data, and it's one of the top two downloaded mobile applications in the US—it's very specific, a utility. The copy clarifies the functionality. The microsite for the iPhone is branded The Weather Channel. It's available to iPhone and iPod touch users at www.weather.com/iphone, and looks and feels like an iPhone.

We're pioneering a new format—copy is utilitarian now. Some companies can extend reach into product promotion in this format. It's about the appropriateness of copy and design; it still has to be appealing even if we have just one or two words. Blogs are pushing material out to phones too: increasingly detailed messages and information are being exchanged. The Safari browser should mark the beginnings of new developments as it directly correlates to mobile devices.

When competitors try to differentiate similar products you'll see more different uses of copy, as messages need greater explanation. We could have a whole screen of just copy, and this now gives us room for a reasonable message. Every 12 months, technological advances give us more room to use copy creatively. The future of digital mobile and Web interfaces and messaging will be about banner ads with Flash animations with looped micro-videos. Up until now these have been sloppy, but are becoming more refined now and the animations look fluid. They're winning the audience's attention and get good responses.

Increasing screen size of smartphones gives us opportunities. We can display whole pages, and a page now fills the whole monitor. You'll see more creative applications, promotions, or cross-promotions, giving users the opportunity to jump off and explore other microsites.

Interview: Catherine Toole, Sticky Content

Catherine Toole is a copywriter, journalist, and lecturer who founded and is managing director of Sticky Content, a digital-copy agency specializing in planning, writing, and editing copy across digital platforms, from websites to e-mail, and mobile to blogs. She explains how Web users scan for key “information cues” rather than reading screenfuls of text, and how writing copy that is search-engine friendly is now simply part of the job.

The main difference between writing copy for print and the Web is how your readers read you. Online, to be frank, they don't. Instead of reading from left to right, top to bottom, studying and digesting text as they might with print, online readers scan pages fast, looking for information cues and signposts. Web users are impatient, task-focused, and extremely disloyal: if they can't find what they're looking for easily, they're off.

A decade ago, we'd be commissioned to fill commercial and corporate websites with lots of news stories, feature articles, and white papers. Quantity was the focus—lots of “deep content” was supposed to result in longer site visits, and average length of visit was a key statistic used to sell online advertising space. But now, we focus on short, highly influential text that encourages actions and transactions: key messages, signposting, top-level navigation buttons, and link or “anchor” text. It's not about how long a user stays on your site anymore, it's what your text can get them to learn or do while they're there.

With most commercial sites, readers are not there for fun. They want the cheapest flight to New York, the best deal on car insurance, your company phone number. The title of the famous usability manual by Steve Krug, *Don't Make Me Think*, is a great mantra for web copywriters. If your text is well structured, easy to scan, clean, clear, and beautifully written, readers should be able to find their way around and interact with the site easily. And that usually translates into sales.

Less is more online. Text must be kept focused on home pages, landing pages, and other top-level pages. The function of these pages is to help readers orient themselves and to encourage them not to leave the site but to move forward to a specific action or information point.

Before Google, most Web users typed in a URL and landed on your website's home page. Now, because the majority of traffic comes from search engines or e-mail, readers tend to land

directly onto a product- or topic-specific page lower down in your site structure.

There's quite an art to writing these “landing pages.” They must be short, scannable, findable by search engines, yet still compelling, benefited, and targeted. Usability guru Jacob Nielsen's “Rule of Twos” asserts that online readers focus on the first two words of a sentence, the first two sentences in a paragraph, and the first two paragraphs on a Web page. So good writers look to front-load sentences with the most important messages or the biggest customer benefits.

Copy on Web pages, especially landing pages, has to be self-contained. It has to make complete sense in itself, out of context of the rest of the site, as there is no way of knowing where readers have arrived from and how much they already know. The best sites use a consistent, on-brand tone of voice and deploy strong editorial style guides and formats across the site. Frequently, when we start a project, there will be guidelines for designers but no language guidelines for copywriters. Often our first job is to agree and write these.

We're often asked to suggest links for Web copy too. A web copywriter must be aware of what else is on the site, so they can insert links that direct readers to other, relevant content. Of course this process can be automated—the related links in the right-hand column of the BBC's news website is a perfect example of this—but this only works if Web editors and publishers tag their work correctly in the first place.

Tagging is another task unique to the digital copywriter. We are often asked to tag individual content items with key-word phrases, categorizing each piece so that it can be easily linked to in future by authors writing on the same subject. If a strict tagging convention isn't observed, this doesn't work. For example, if one writer tags a bride's story as “wedding” and another tags a piece “marriage,” the two won't be related unless

- Home
- The Essentials
- In The Studio
- On Location
- Hiring Equipment**
- Post Production
- Business Support
- On AIR
- About Us
- Contact Us

entertainment & media
hiring equipment



Hiring equipment

The costly special effects equipment you've hired in gets damaged mid-production – can you pay for the ongoing hire costs as well as replacements? How would you cover your legal bills if the hiring company decided to sue you for negligence?

From specialist plant or machinery to TV production equipment... If you regularly need to hire out or hire in equipment, you'll want to know that you're covered in the event of any loss or accidental damage and that your project won't suffer.

Hired-in equipment – All Risks protects you against loss, destruction or damage to property which has been hired-in. You will be covered for:

- Temporary repairing of damage to property.
- Temporary hire or rental of replacement property following a loss of up to £25,000.
- Legal costs (with your insurer's consent) in pursuit of rights of recovery.
- Equipment in UK, Europe and worldwide (subject to conditions).

Hired-out equipment – All Risks protects you against loss, destruction or damage to property, which you hire out.

Engineering provides cover for damage occurring to plant or machinery at your premises, such as:

- Sudden and unforeseen damage including breakdown, explosion or collapse.
- Accidental damage.
- Liability for hired-in plant or machinery.

What to do next:



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“Web users are impatient, task-focused and extremely disloyal: if they can’t find what they’re looking for easily, they’re off.”

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Job opportunities



“Fortune Cooke has the people, the projects, the career path and the package. Whenever I'm ready for a new challenge the next step has always appeared”

Work for us if you...

Appreciate being appreciated.
We value our people and we like to show it: from offering real career progression to keeping our fruit bowl topped up.

Don't want to move on, to get on.
From investing in training to regular appraisals, we make sure that everyone at Fortune Cookie is on a career path.

Know your worth.
We track the market to make sure the packages we offer are some of the best in the industry.

Have a life.
We won't judge your performance by how late you work (we'll judge it using proper, regular performance reviews). We like people with active and stimulating things to do outside the office.

Like responsible businesses.
We don't see why our work should damage the environment so we recycle, use alternative energy suppliers and are committed to becoming a wholly sustainable business by 2009.

Want to avoid the rush hour.
We start at ten so you avoid the madness and arrive fresh and focused at our airy London offices.

You might like to...

- View current job opportunities
- Meet the team
- See some of our work
- Send us your CV

you have software capable of making the connection. Even now, not all our clients have software or conventions in place to do it well, and we end up being asked to suggest links manually.

Calls to action are vital. Since visitors create their own journey through a site, you have to give them lots of options on every page. And you can't control their point of entry, so you must persuade them again on every page. Search engines have a huge effect on how we write copy. Pre-Google, we didn't think much about search terms. Now, so many online businesses live or die by organic search results that search-friendly copy is a must. In basic terms, this means using the same words and phrases people enter in search boxes for title tags of pages, anchor text of links, headlines, and body copy. These search terms will often be supplied to us by the site's SEO (search engine optimization) partner. Rather than call a page "Our software solutions," you'd title it "Our accounting software packages": it's specific and potentially matches what a customer might put into Google.

Search-friendly copy often relies on nouns and key words, but it's not about squeezing in as many search terms as possible at the expense of flow or style. The best Web writers do it without sacrificing tone and readability. Asking and answering questions is one good technique for holding visitors' interest and inserting key terms seamlessly. Print journalists struggle with writing for search as their copy must become more functional and descriptive. There's no room for clever puns, so "Simon Cowell deported from US" is a much more searchable headline than "Mr Nasty voted off."

Not that writing search-friendly copy is just about headlines. Most SEO experts would say link ("anchor") text is actually more important, as search engines partly evaluate the "relevancy" of the website to a certain word or phrase based on the number of links to other relevant content.

Part of a copywriter's job is to work in linking text, internal and external, in such a way that the

connection is clear. But links for links' sake will annoy—you need to ensure they are helpful and relevant. Best practice is to ensure it's clear from link text what readers will get if they click on it.

So search-friendly copy is often more practical and obvious than copy in other media. The editor of a retail website for an international brand used to brief us with: "If it's a toss-up between meaningfulness and creativity, go for meaningful." But informative, search-friendly headlines are usually longer than creative lines, and there is often not enough space. Which is where we get into fights with designers ...

Too often copy is an afterthought and we are brought into a project when the design and build is pretty much there. So we have to "write to fit" spaces left by designers. It's what we call the "<copy goes here>" syndrome: it causes serious problems. If a button is easier to understand if it's five words long but a designer has only left a ten-character space, it's the user who suffers.

The best projects are the ones where the designers and copywriters work together from the start. Designers often prefer to design with "real copy" rather than placeholder text anyway. And if the copywriter gets involved early on, they can influence the information architecture of the site, ensuring that text is presented in a logical structure. Also we can work together to create strong page formats that work editorially as well as visually: clear, repeatable formats are what make websites easy to use and navigate.

Equally, the best Web copywriters are very aware of what the designer is trying to achieve with the look and feel of the site and are keen to support it. Sadly, since most Web content is published via content-management systems, it's all too easy to send off your text and never review it in situ prior to publication. Ideally, a writer should be aware of what the finished page will look like and make sure copy both makes sense on the page and supports the design.

Without personality, you're not interesting

Having reduced your copy down to a potent core, you have one final job to do: check for personality. All too often copywriters craft clear, concise copy that presents the message accurately and delivers all of the requirements of the brief, yet is bland. This is the result of technique winning out over creativity, and must be avoided.

With so few words at your disposal and the restriction of having to create pieces of tight, informative copy that can be read in any order, adding personality to your copy can be a major challenge. Use the lightest of touches. A choice word in the opening paragraph, the use of a surprising word on a hot button, the inclusion of a colloquialism in a headline, or the addition of a throwaway comment at the bottom of a page—as long as it is in line with the agreed tone of voice, brand style, and objectives of the brief—can work wonders. This light touch can be all you need to include a sense of humor and show that there is a human behind all of the technology and glitz of the site. This is about breaking, or seeming to break, with some tone-of-voice conventions and adding a few surprises here and there, adding a little bit of spice to the mix.

One way of weaving a strong personality into your copy is to recognize that you are enjoying an interactive relationship with the visitors to the site and to acknowledge this is the way you should present your copy. It is generally expected that the tone of voice for a website will be more conversational and flexible than within more formal material such as an annual report or company brochure, so play to this. Be chatty and relaxed, suggest links rather than telling visitors where to go, welcome them when they get to the new page, and invite them to visit a different page if the one they've landed on doesn't suit them.

Personality requires some nerve and a lot of energy. It requires you to push yourself outside your usual risk-free comfort zone and try a new approach. This is the only way to be different. It is no use trying to write your site “in the style of Innocent Drinks” for example, when you should be writing your site in the style of your client. It's one thing to add a few friendly comments, and quite another to maintain a consistently warm and friendly tone of voice throughout the entire site, even the boring sections, without the joins showing. Be confident, and enjoy putting across a strong personality, but remember that everything you do must be on-brief and relevant to the overall tone of voice and brand style of the client.

Your project may be a single e-mail rather than a website, and may contain moving imagery and soundbites. Writing for the spoken word is similar to writing for a reader (or scanner!) but you should incorporate an additional technique: read your copy aloud as you develop it, to check for timing and credibility, rhythm, and flow. Messages that read well do not always work well when spoken, so the more you listen to it, the more you can fine-tune it into credible copy.

Your visitors may be creating their own content

Content is increasingly in the hands of the visitor. Not only do your visitors choose the messages that they are prepared to absorb, they are able to create their own messages too and compete with you for the attention of the other visitors. They may be writing customer reviews, conversing in your chatroom, contributing to **blogs**, or posting content onto YouTube, MySpace, or a similar site.

Larger corporations are finding themselves competing with “amateur” sites that aim to tell the “true” story about the way they conduct their environmental responsibilities, or about what their trading ethics are like, or perhaps to expose some form of unappealing practice. As a copywriter who fully understands the target audience, if you are looking after the content of the official site you

“In an Internet world, opportunity for marketers has nothing to do with recreating mass marketing and creating commercials that can't be skipped. Instead marketers can use the many dimensions of our media culture to tell more complex stories faster and more effectively than they ever could have using television commercials.”

Seth Godin
All Marketers Are Liars

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ARCHITECTURAL CONJECTURE
URBAN SPECULATION
LANDSCAPE FUTURES

TUESDAY, MARCH 10, 2008

BELOW THE POLAR ICE CAP

[Image: Photo courtesy of the U.S. Navy, via the *New York Times*.]

At one point in college I worked at the school's student radio station, where everyone would write mini-reviews onto white stickers placed on the front covers of CDs – but there was one album I remember that sounded, someone wrote, “like the dream of a submarine’s machinist passing under the polar ice cap,” a description which has stuck with me to this day.

So I was interested to see an article this morning in the *New York Times* about a “brotherhood of submariners” during the Cold War who had their own “doomsday preparations,” wearing in and out of the polar ice.

In 1970, for instance:

In great secrecy, moving as quietly as possible below treacherous ice, the *Queenfish*, under the command of Captain Alfred S. McLaren, swept thousands of miles of previously uncharted seabed in search of safe submarine routes. It often had to maneuver between shallow bottoms and ice keels, sliding down from the surface more than 100 feet, threatening the sub and the lives of 117 men

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ARCHITECTURAL CONJECTURE
URBAN SPECULATION
LANDSCAPE FUTURES

SATURDAY, MARCH 24, 2008

FEELING RESIDENTIAL

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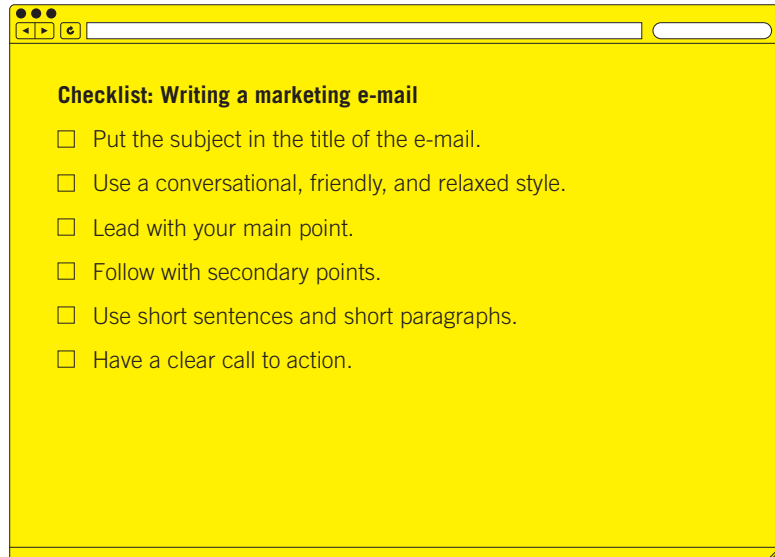
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everyone would write mini-reviews onto white stickers placed on the front covers of CDs – but there was one album I remember that sounded, someone wrote, “like the dream of a submarine’s machinist passing under the polar ice cap,” a description which has stuck with me to this day.

So I was interested to see an article this morning in the *New York Times* about a “brotherhood of submariners” during the Cold War ...

Using compelling copy to make otherwise dry subjects sound interesting, under headings such as “architectural conjecture” and “urban speculation,” this blog covers everything from plate tectonics to airborne utopias. The style is brief, concise, and full of interest and variety, and the navigation is clear and simple.



have to be aware that your target audience may well be looking at these less complimentary sites too, and address this. Openness and honesty is an integral part of the directness of modern digital communications—it cuts through the clutter like nothing else.

Your tone of voice should be real and credible, not just an acceptable corporate stance. Reflect the tone of the blogs your audience write and read by being conversational and less formal than the client might expect (you can justify this as a characteristic of the Internet) and build maximum credibility by providing strong, accurate, and informative content that cannot be accessed elsewhere. This will help to give your site a clear point of difference from other commercial competitors.

Your audience expect the best of both worlds from you. As a minimum they want the site to have a quality look and feel, with excellent navigation, and to be packed with features and points of interest. They also expect you to provide very detailed, in-depth, and original content that will enhance their knowledge and inform them fully.

As copywriter, your role is to help move the client's voice forward to match the typical sites that are visited by your target audience. By doing this you will fit in with the visitor's perceptions about cutting-edge websites. As well as gaining their attention, you might just achieve the ultimate objective and create a site that they recommend to their closest friends and colleagues. You never know, they might even post some of it on YouTube!

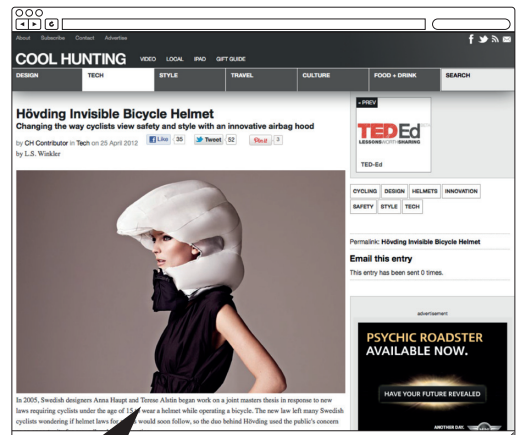
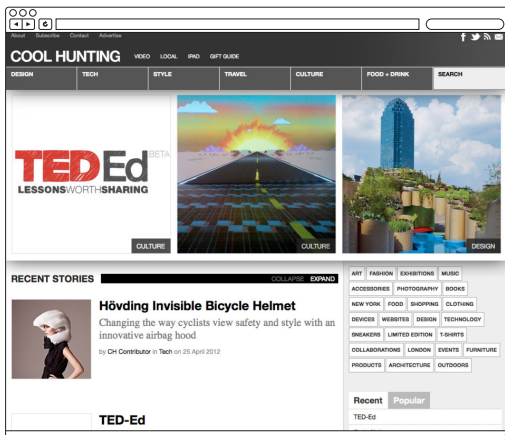
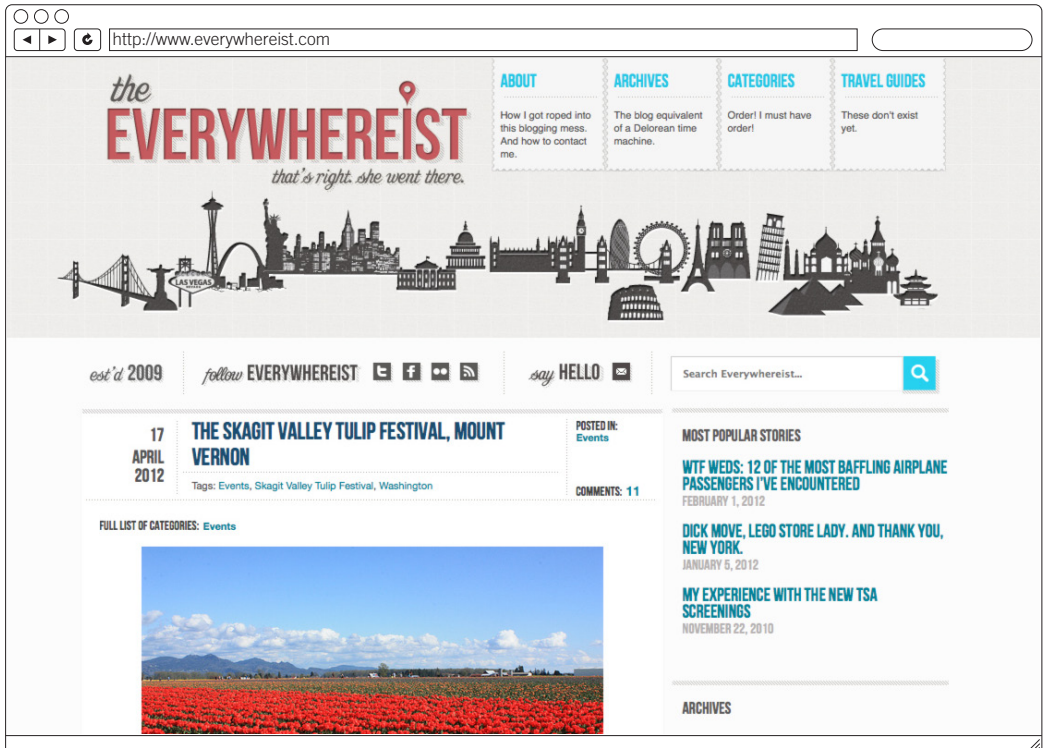
“The Internet has rapidly become the tool of choice for spreading information about multinationals around the world.”

Naomi Klein, No Logo

Online content and social media

You've set up your website and it's a comprehensive “shop window” for your business, showcasing your brand and allowing people to buy products at the click of a button. Now it's time to look at other ways to communicate and interact with people online.

Social media refers to Web-based platforms that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content. The forms of social media that we can use are expanding all the time. Most are interactive, in that they allow the reader to respond, and they range from podcasts and Internet forums to social networking (such as Facebook) and microblogging (such as Twitter). These tools allow you to generate two-way conversations with customers, giving

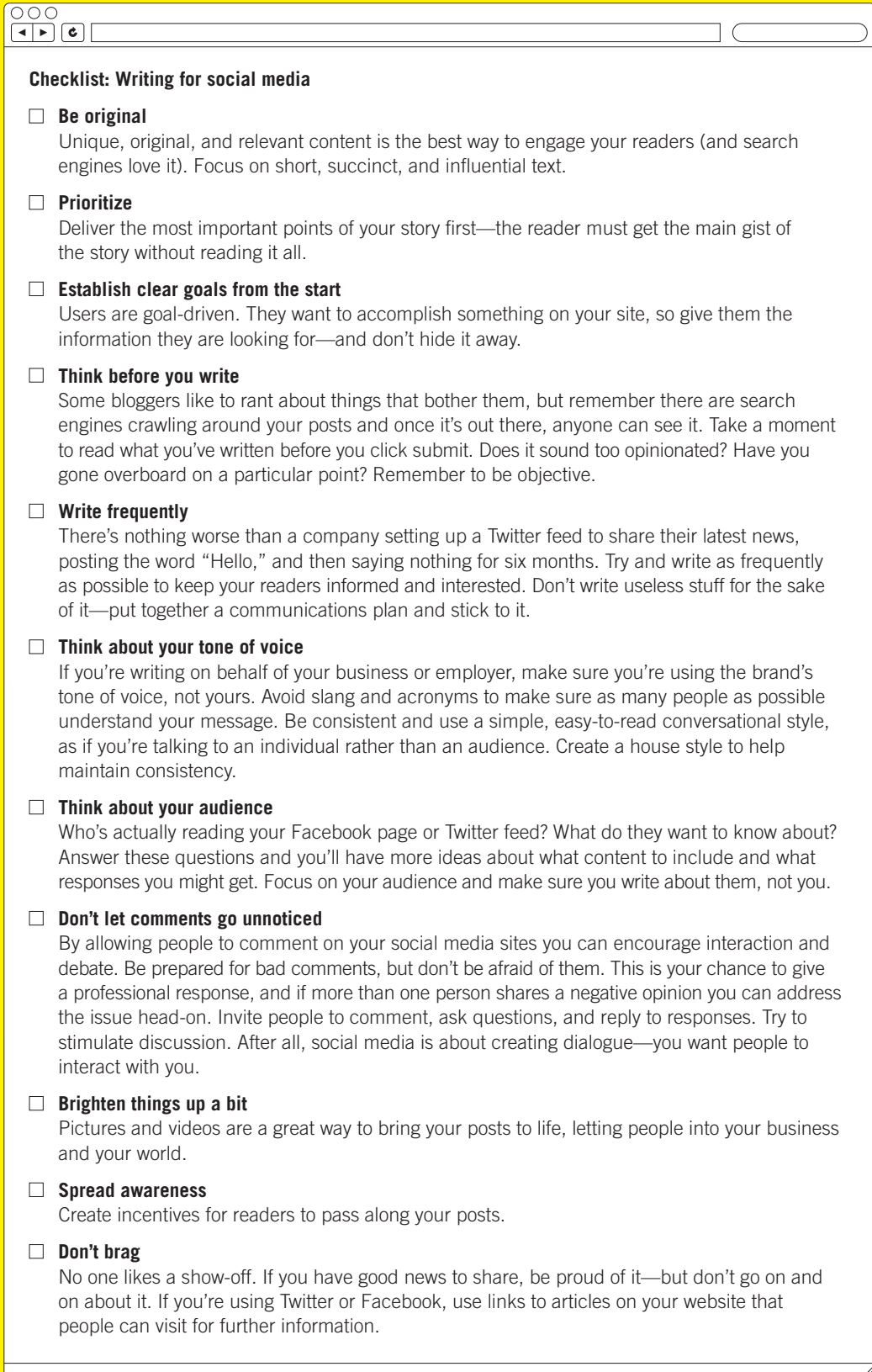


The Hövdung Invisible Helmet is a fabric collar containing a built-in airbag designed to inflate around a cyclist's head on impact. The fabric shells of the collar are replaceable and meant to be changed based on weather and style, which makes for a stylish piece of safety gear that will save your hair and, most importantly, your life.

Blogs usually take the form of online diaries or commentaries. An original voice and a good idea can inspire an audience to visit the website frequently.

After she was laid off from her job, Geraldine DeRuiter started traveling with her husband and blogging their experiences on the Everywhereist.

You never know what the intrepid trend spotters at Cool Hunting will bring to your attention next. All you can be sure of is that it will be something cool.



Checklist: Writing for social media

- Be original**

Unique, original, and relevant content is the best way to engage your readers (and search engines love it). Focus on short, succinct, and influential text.
- Prioritize**

Deliver the most important points of your story first—the reader must get the main gist of the story without reading it all.
- Establish clear goals from the start**

Users are goal-driven. They want to accomplish something on your site, so give them the information they are looking for—and don't hide it away.
- Think before you write**

Some bloggers like to rant about things that bother them, but remember there are search engines crawling around your posts and once it's out there, anyone can see it. Take a moment to read what you've written before you click submit. Does it sound too opinionated? Have you gone overboard on a particular point? Remember to be objective.
- Write frequently**

There's nothing worse than a company setting up a Twitter feed to share their latest news, posting the word "Hello," and then saying nothing for six months. Try and write as frequently as possible to keep your readers informed and interested. Don't write useless stuff for the sake of it—put together a communications plan and stick to it.
- Think about your tone of voice**

If you're writing on behalf of your business or employer, make sure you're using the brand's tone of voice, not yours. Avoid slang and acronyms to make sure as many people as possible understand your message. Be consistent and use a simple, easy-to-read conversational style, as if you're talking to an individual rather than an audience. Create a house style to help maintain consistency.
- Think about your audience**

Who's actually reading your Facebook page or Twitter feed? What do they want to know about? Answer these questions and you'll have more ideas about what content to include and what responses you might get. Focus on your audience and make sure you write about them, not you.
- Don't let comments go unnoticed**

By allowing people to comment on your social media sites you can encourage interaction and debate. Be prepared for bad comments, but don't be afraid of them. This is your chance to give a professional response, and if more than one person shares a negative opinion you can address the issue head-on. Invite people to comment, ask questions, and reply to responses. Try to stimulate discussion. After all, social media is about creating dialogue—you want people to interact with you.
- Brighten things up a bit**

Pictures and videos are a great way to bring your posts to life, letting people into your business and your world.
- Spread awareness**

Create incentives for readers to pass along your posts.
- Don't brag**

No one likes a show-off. If you have good news to share, be proud of it—but don't go on and on about it. If you're using Twitter or Facebook, use links to articles on your website that people can visit for further information.

them the opportunity to feed back and you the chance to respond. Social media is a measurable communications platform that lets you develop online communities of fans and followers. It's an opportunity you shouldn't miss.

Social media tools are all about content and personality. Regular content keeps people interested in your company, brand, or product, and personality helps them relate to you. But it's no good writing any old rubbish. Just like preparing your company brochure or catalog for print, you should plan your online communications carefully and ensure they are relevant to your audience.

You can do more harm than good

At all times you need to be acutely aware of your responsibility: you are carrying the brand and you don't want to damage it in any way. You can share points of view, but keep it professional; you don't want to alienate managers, stakeholders, or customers because you once accidentally said something thoughtless on Twitter. Don't be fooled into thinking you're having an online chat with your mates—there's no room for personal opinion. You're broadcasting content to the world, and it can be copied, retweeted, reposted, linked to, and criticized in an instant. The golden rule is: if you wouldn't say it in the boardroom, don't say it online.

When blogging, think about and plan your content in advance, just like a publisher would. Think about the quality of writing, your audience, and whether any approval processes are needed. Don't be random or last-minute—keep focused and write about things that are meaningful to your readers. Your use of social media channels should also be linked into an editorial and marketing plan. At times you might need to use these channels for quick news-related responses, but you should still have a strategy underpinning how you're going to maintain and regularly update the channels with fresh content.

Writing for new digital formats

In addition to writing copy for a website—which requires you to consider how people search and scan rather than read—you will also need to consider new digital formats: from on-screen retail displays to cell phones and tablets. In the US, members of the Online Publishers Association are developing new online brand advertising formats using video and motion graphics that, until recently, have tended to be restricted to simple banner ads. The traditional display advertisement is being reinvented in a new video format, and these advertisements are big, fun, and easy to view. They use sound as much as written text, and as the writer you'll be crafting messages that will be listened to as well as text that will be read.

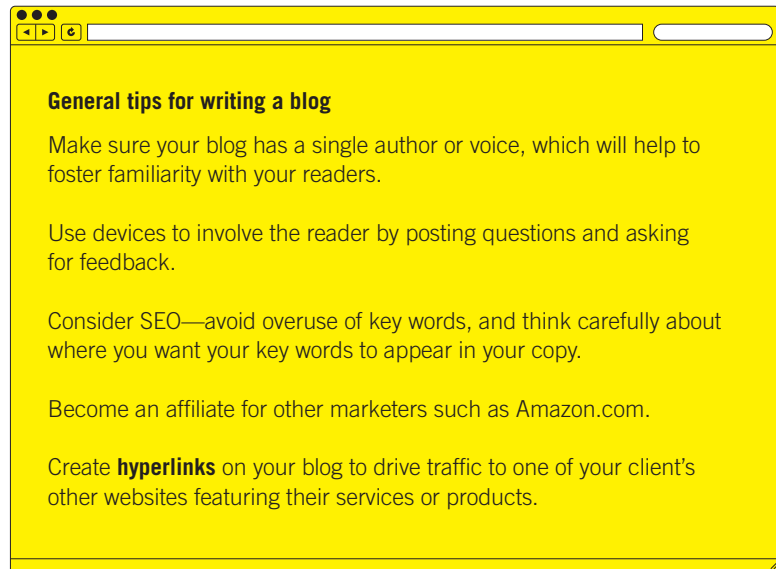
Writing for blogs

A blog (contraction of “weblog”) features regular entries consisting of comments and attachments that allow the audience to respond. It is the interactive nature of the blog that defines it. Blogs usually take one of two forms: commentary or diary. In the business world the online diary is of little interest; it is the commentary approach that is proving to be so effective in reaching and developing a defined audience. The most well-known blogging facility, Twitter, is a microblog (limiting you to 140 characters or less per “tweet”). More recently, there have been rapid developments in video blogging featuring user-generated video content where amateur content is posted on video-sharing websites such as YouTube and Flickr.

When you blog you become a publisher

A traditional publishing house wouldn't last long if they generated content randomly and printed it without much thought, but this is what most people do with their blog. You can do as much harm to your reputation as good if you don't get it right. Remember that social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter can have very different levels of engagement, and therefore levels of control, from a marketing viewpoint, will also be different.

When you write a blog, for yourself or for a client, you need to know who you are writing for and why they will be interested. As with every other form of copywriting you must do your best to develop the messages to offer a genuine insight. Keep the text short and sweet and tailor it for the reader. Have a content plan, even if it is fairly loose and open to last-minute adjustment, and stick to it.





Exercise: developing your critical eye for content

Choose a subject you like, perhaps a hobby or interest. Search a few of the most obvious key words associated with this subject and visit four or five sites briefly.

Choose the best, the worst, and an average site, and print off the home page and a typical other page for all three. Lay the printouts on a table for comparison.

Analyze the comparative strengths and weaknesses of the copy on each site: list three strengths and three weaknesses for each.

Take the worst of the three and have a go at restructuring the copy and drafting some new messages. See if you can make it better than the best of the three.



Exercise: doing it better than the best

Find one of the top websites in any major field, one that should be an example of best practice. Answer these questions:

- Is the content clear and accessible?*
- Is it easy to navigate around the site?*
- Does the content make sense to me?*
- Does the site give me what I need from it?*

Then look at your answers and consider how you might be able to make any improvements to the content, or the way the site is accessed. Answer these questions:

- Is there anything wrong with the copy in the site?*
- What would I do to improve it?*

Draft a new version incorporating all of your thoughts, and then review it after a couple of days to see how well you think you did.



Round-up

The quality of content is the most important element of the digital revolution.

The content you create has to be informative, clear, and compelling.

Copywriters usually lead the planning and structuring of a website.

Thorough preparation and planning is essential and simplicity is the key.

Use a brief, punchy, and energetic style that presents your copy as concise quality information.

As the writer you are assuming the role of the site tour guide.

Give the user full control of how the content can be accessed and used.

Establish a coherent plan for all of the content before you start.

If your visitors can't find their information easily they won't hang around for long.

Readers will not be reading copy fully, they will be scanning for key words.

Digital formats require you to cut your copy down to the bone.

Gathering together the available material for the content is a core part of your role.

Do a separate plan for the writing time required.

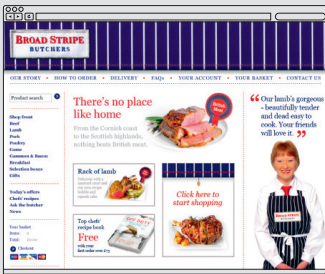
Keep cutting and cutting, being careful not to lose any of your core content.

Bland copy is the result of putting technique before creativity.

Be confident, and enjoy putting across a strong personality.

Case Study: Broad Stripe Butchers

Lorna Milligan is a senior graphic designer at Jupiter Design in the UK. Her work involves briefing and managing in-house copywriters, designers, photographers, and artworkers, and she recently led the creation and launch of a customer-facing e-commerce site for Fairfax Meadow, the biggest supplier of meat to Michelin-starred restaurants in the UK. Here she explains how the copy and tone of voice are among the most important aspects of the site.



Crispy crackling
Sizzlin' sausages
Tasty chops
Beautiful bacon
It's got to be pork.



The Objective:

replicating the premium butcher experience online

We were taking a purely trade service, Fairfax Meadow, and offering their premium meat directly to the public, and after profiling the audience we knew we had to speak to them clearly, confidently, and engagingly. The voice had to sound warm, friendly, and real, and not obviously copywritten. Because it is only online it was important to make it sound personal, and have a face and voice behind the site.

From start to finish, all of the communications around this new brand had to feel as if they were speaking to someone personally. It is a very important expression of the brand, which puts the customer directly in touch with master butchers. The objective of the brand was to sell the product, and the objective of the copy to bring the brand to life.

The Approach:

using real people to speak just like real people

We knew the audience loves organic food and we built a profile around this. We decided to keep it separate from the main trade business and we created the name and brand, Broad Stripe, in order to launch the new website service.

We had played with loads of names, and started exploring ideas around the butcher's striped apron. The broad blue stripe means Master Butcher. We presented this as the route to follow—with the apron providing the brand with an established feel and positioning it as an expert in the field. The website had to feel real, like interacting with a butcher. We created a "family" of butchers, casting everyone from the company. Some were real butchers; others worked in the offices. We created the butchers' personalities before casting so we could find faces that would fit with the characters we devised. Giving them personalities enabled us to have real conversations in character and helped the language sound like a real conversation with a customer, giving the brand personality.

The main characters were Vernon, Pete, Janet, and a young apprentice. They bring the brand to life in imaginary conversations and quotations on the website. The whole brand hangs on this tone of voice and method of communicating to the customer. We didn't take the usual approach to writing the website—there is no introductory copy, for example. We demonstrate the values of the brand and the quality of the meat through the voices of the butchers on the website.

There are three types of copy: the butchers' voices (and the visual part of the brand) and the two sections within the site—the educational aspects and the selling aspects. Educational aspects include hints and tips for storing and cooking meat, recipes, or celebrity interviews. Selling aspects are very much about the food, with photography and copy evoking the mouthwatering qualities, describing the flavors of the fresh lamb and the sticky and sweet pork.

Hero banners feature product copy—12 rotate continually, and each takes the visitor to the shop front. We use appealing copy straight away on the home page, and when the visitor comes to the shop front the canopy moves up, giving a sense of entering something. The hero banners and ads on the site show a range of food, from typical British fodder to à la carte dishes, and we adjusted the language to suit the mood these created.

The educational side is important as it provides customers with cooking tips and recipe ideas so that they use it at any time, not just when purchasing meat. The recipes are useful reference points, and they appear in relevant locations throughout the site. Examples include how to cook the perfect steak, explaining how the products are so good all you need is a bit of seasoning.

The call to action is made clear with a butcher's chalkboard, with writing highlighting bestsellers, as well as mini-ads for the best cuts. Prompts to buy appear frequently. Information features show which parts of the animal are linked to the cuts, and which are best for roasting or frying. Each box of meat sent to customers has a card signed by the packer.

The Result:

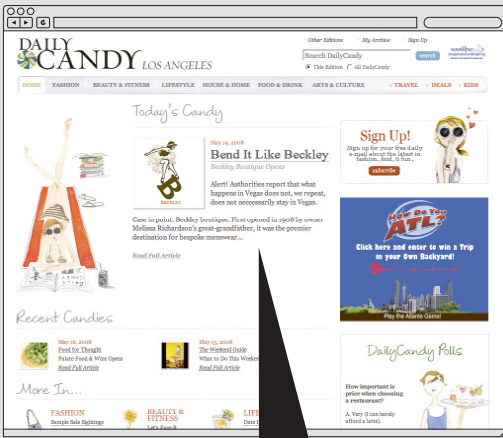
the customers build strong relationships with the brand

The butchers' voices are what bring the Broad Stripe brand to life. The tone of voice is friendly, warm, and inviting, enticing and drawing the reader in. Copy is punchy, talking about sizzling sausages, but is also descriptive and evocative, with references to taste and flavor indicating quality without spelling it out overtly. It is helpful too, explaining storage and delivery, showing how the order is constructed, the speed of delivery, and that there is always someone available at the end of a phone. We have found the mini-ads in the third column drive a lot of the business, and the front page offers are effective too.

The premium feel and upmarket approach was best received in the south of England, where customers will buy a week's supply of meat at a time. Broad Stripe is an aspirational brand; we're proud that our customers leave the box out in the kitchen.

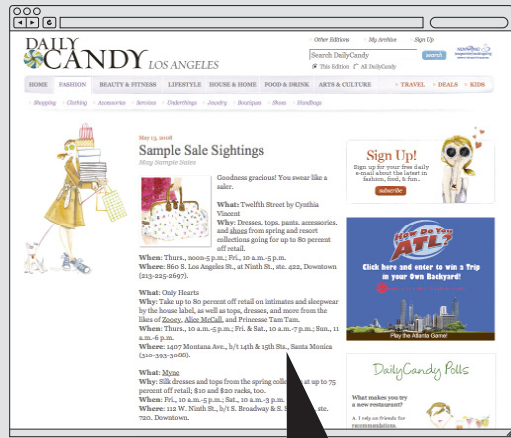
Case Study: Daily Candy

Daily Candy is the “insider’s guide to your city,” taking full advantage of digital technology to deliver red-hot information to subscribers every day. Dannielle Kyrillos is editor-at-large, overseeing all of the content. Here she explains how copy is at the heart of the business, and how they manage to do such a good job of publishing lively and inspiring information.



Alert! Authorities report that what happens in Vegas does not, we repeat, does not necessarily stay in Vegas.

Case in point: Beckley boutique. First opened in 1908 by owner Melissa Richardson’s great grandfather, it was the premier destination for bespoke menswear ...



What: Twelfth Street by Cynthia Vincent

Why: Dresses, tops, pants, accessories, and shoes from spring and resort collections going for up to 80 percent off retail.

What: Only Hearts

Why: Take up to 80 percent off retail on intimates and sleepwear by the house label, as well as tops, dresses, and more from the likes of Zooey, Alice McCall, and Princesse Tam Tam.

The Objective:

to set up and manage an instant information service

Danni Levy, a print journalist who had been writing for a range of beauty titles and other publications, had been frustrated with long lead times. Even on weekly magazines it could take up to three weeks to get a story published. She was also aware that much of the information being published was not immediate—for example, it would typically be announced that a new restaurant would be opening in a month's time.

Danni decided to create a news and information service providing hot tips and insider advice on food and drink, fashion, and other lifestyle topics, with the focus on what is happening on the day the information is published. Using the immediacy of the Internet and e-mail, she wanted every item to give the reader something to see, to do, or to touch on that day.

The Approach:

writing everything to be read in 30 seconds and remain compelling

Danni had been saving to go to business school, and decided to use these funds to start Daily Candy in March 2000. Its whole purpose was to provide information that was useful.

Dannielle Kyrillos joined the six-strong team in 2002. Dannielle is based in New York, where Daily Candy's only dedicated office is located:

"As editor-at-large I do lots of things. I know the voice and tone well, and I'm good at explaining the brand and what it stands for. I act as an 'old soul,' providing advice and help to our editors.

"Originally Danni did all of the writing and in doing so established the Daily Candy voice, which creates the impression every item is written by the same person, although it is now managed by our writers and editors.

"We have editorial that cannot be bought, and advertising. Every item we write is designed to be read in 30 seconds, and be compelling at the same time. Our copy is practical and informative but it is also humorous and full of life. We assume a level of intelligence in the reader, and the copy doesn't talk down to them. It follows a consistent train of thought, and makes everyone feel like an insider.

"At our New York office we have a technical team that manages the IT and a marketing team that extends the Daily Candy experience, which sometimes includes running offline events. The

Internet is not only building virtual communities, it is building real-life communities too. We're encouraging people to move from their desk chair and get involved with the life round them, try restaurants, see artists, and visit stores.

"We always keep our eyes open for information. We are a grass-roots network and tend not to give too much coverage to the big brand stories. Our job is to write about the stuff that no one has heard of; that's our point of difference. The mainstream is already being covered.

"Each city that Daily Candy serves has its own full-time writer/editor working from home. Each editor (most of whom are women) maintains a network of freelance contributors who supply a constant stream of quality information. Publicists also pitch us lots of ideas and news, but these make up only a tiny percentage of our content.

"We have a style guide that outlines the sorts of words we will use and those we won't use. We also have fixed formats for how we write things like dates and addresses, which everyone has to follow. We all share a quirky sense of humor, and we are all quite nerdy about grammar and metaphors, for example. We are also very precise about editing the copy and making everything legitimate. Every piece goes through various layers of editing.

"Most of our writers are women, and we have been compared to *Sex in the City*, but we're careful not to fall into a 'chick-lit' style. We'll never use 'fashionista' or 'come on girl' or any of the phrases in the mainstream press. These are all banned. We trust our editor's opinion of the city, but we know what makes it a Daily Candy item—it's our 'secret sauce' and we work to make it as compelling as possible."

The Result:

the fresh, witty style keeps subscribers tuned in

"Our subscribers and readers are vociferous, they never hesitate to tell us what they think—they e-mail us all the time and we get tons and tons and tons of correspondence telling us what they like and don't like. Most of our content is free, and we take the view that if it offends, you don't have to read it.

"Daily Candy now publishes 13 daily editions in the US and UK, employing over 50 people. We know it is working and that our tone of voice resonates because of the high level of subscriptions we receive, having never spent any money on advertising. We're not snobby or patronizing, and we know that many of our readers pass our articles on to their friends."

Case Study: *Creative Review* Blog

The Creative Review blog is the main source of online news and opinion for the advertising, design, and visual communications industries. Most posts are generated by the in-house editorial team, while others involve guest writers. Nick Asbury is a freelance writer and one half of creative partnership Asbury & Asbury. Several of his articles have been featured as guest posts on the Creative Review blog. Here Nick offers some advice on writing for blogs.

The screenshot shows the Creative Review blog interface. At the top, there is a navigation menu with links for Register, Log in, Search, Current Issue (CR Blog), Subjects, Jobs, Feed, Back issues, About, Advertise, Directory, and The Annual. A banner below the menu reads "WHO WILL BE THE STAR OF THE SHOW" with images of high-heeled feet. The main content area features an article titled "A change in the linguistic weather" by Nick Asbury, dated 10 January 2011. The article includes a photo of BBC weatherman Rob McElwee pointing at a weather map of Europe with various weather icons and numbers. The sidebar on the right contains a "Get the RSS Feed" button, a "Subscribe to the CR Newsletter" form, and a list of related subjects and keywords, including "Advertising" and "Bbc".

Last night, BBC weatherman Rob McElwee gave his final TV forecast. It marked the end of 20 years tackling one of the toughest communication challenges of all: how to talk about the same subject every night and make it sound fresh.

The Objective:

write something interesting

Which is harder than it sounds. I've never set out to write something specifically for the *Creative Review* blog; it's a case of writing something that interests me, and seeing where it leads. The *Creative Review* blog has republished some of the posts that I've written for my own website.

Mark Sinclair is Deputy Editor at *Creative Review* and describes what they look for in a blog post: "What we're benefitting from in republishing a post is that person's unique take on something—their ability to notice and then scrutinize the words, the design approach, the use of media in a given situation. It should be something we haven't seen anywhere else, is well written, and has a good style that would fit with the tone of voice of *Creative Review* but, equally, has enough personality in it to be identifiable as a 'guest' post. Essentially, a post that makes me think, 'I wish I'd written that.'"

The Approach:

write what interests you

As a writer, you're likely to be interested in language, tone of voice, and wordplay. A useful trick is to apply that perspective in unexpected areas.

Take weather forecasts. Everyone watches weather forecasts. What if you examine them from the point of view of a copywriter? What can you learn about the way people use language in particular contexts? I spent a while collecting the quirkiest quotes from BBC weather forecasts, which became a blog post about the language of forecasting.

Tonally, it was important to make the post thoughtful as well as entertaining. As a general rule, if you're writing about something quirky, it's best not to do it in a quirky way.

The Result:

content to entertain and inspire

The result in my case was a farewell blog post to BBC weatherman Rob McElwee on the occasion of his final forecast—initially posted on my own blog, then picked up by *Creative Review*. I had always loved McElwee's imaginative and whimsical turns of phrase:

"That tongue of cloud is a forecast—it may be a little more dispersed than that."

"A cloud envelope coming up through Cornwall late in the day."

"The wind is very much not there."

As a weather forecaster, McElwee faced a challenge that, as a copywriter, I could relate to: how to talk about the same subject every day and make it sound fresh. That gave me the idea of examining the way McElwee engaged his viewers through creative communication. Readers of the *Creative Review* blog commented on my post to let me know that I was not the only one who appreciated McElwee's nightly forecasts.

Other blog posts I've written have also been inspired by creative communication, including an analysis of the writing styles employed in genuine bank robbery notes, collected at the blog Banknotes365.com. If "copywriting is any form of writing designed to persuade you to do something," I reasoned in my post, then bank robbers, whose notes are designed to prompt bank tellers to hand over large amounts of money, are "natural born copywriters."

Both examples take something apparently offbeat and use it as a pretext for talking about the serious craft of language. Look closely enough at anything and it becomes interesting. That's a good principle in blogging—and writing in general.

Proving you can bring imagination and virtuosity to anything. Love it.

Katy

2011-01-14 19:37:27

A good definition of copywriting is any form of writing designed to persuade you to do something (usually involving parting with money). The most common advice is to keep it brief, remember your target audience and have a clear “ask”. It turns out that bank robbers are natural born copywriters...

The screenshot shows the CreativeReview website interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with 'CreativeReview' logo and 'Advertising, design and visual culture' tagline. A search bar and navigation links like 'CR Blog', 'Subjects', 'Jobs', 'Feed', 'About', 'Advertise', 'Directory', and 'The Annual' are visible. A prominent banner for 'BIGSTOCK' offers 'Get 6 images FREE' with a 'sign up now' button. Below this, the 'CR Blog' section features the article 'The Art of Persuasive Writing' by Nick Asbury, dated 2 November 2009. The article includes a handwritten note from a bank robber: 'THIS IS NOT A JOKE, I HAVE A GUN LOADED, READY. I WANT ALL THE MONEY IN THE DRAWER NOW. NO DYE PACKS OR ALARMS. IF THERE ARE, THIS PLACE WILL EXPLODE. DO AS I SAY AND EVERYONE WILL BE OK. IF NOT, PEOPLE WILL DIE'. The article text explains that this is a brilliant example of copywriting used by bank robbers to persuade victims to hand over money. It also mentions 'Banknotes365' as a collection of such notes and provides a few examples of persuasive copywriting, such as '\$5,000 in 20s and 50s. No dye packs.'

This is not a joke. I have a gun loaded, ready. I want all the money in the drawer now. No dye packs or alarms. If there are, this place will explode. Do as I say and everyone will be OK. If not, people will die.

*I have a gun in my bag.
Give me \$5,000 please.
Thanks a bunch.*

A subtler approach—the threat is implied rather than stated, and the writer is keen to get his audience on side (*please... thanks...*).

http://www.creativereview.co.uk/cr-blog

Banknotes365 is a brilliant collection of notes pushed threateningly across counters in banks around the world – all juxtaposed with photos of their authors.

It would make a great case study in a copywriting workshop. Here are a few examples:

**\$5,000 in 20s and 50s.
No dye packs,
no alarms,
no one gets hurt.**

Good, effective, precise – although possibly focusing too much on the negative.

**I have a gun in my bag.
Give me \$5,000 please.
Thanks a bunch.**

A subtler approach – the threat is implied rather than stated, and the writer is keen to get his audience on side (please... thanks...)

**Do exactly what this says,
fill the bag with \$100s, \$50s and \$20s,
a dye pack
will bring me back
for your ass, do it now.
Truely yours**

Possibly the most creative of the bunch. The unconventional construction of the phrase "A dye pack will bring me back for your ass" lodges it in the mind successfully. "Do exactly what this says" would make a good all-purpose opening for almost any press advertisement.

**This is not a joke.
I have a gun loaded. Ready.
I want all the money in the drawer now.
No dye packs or alarms.
If there are, this place will 'explode.'
Do as I say and everyone will be OK.
If not, people will die.**

This needs a good editor. Note the strange use of single quotes around the word 'explode', which turns a literal threat into a more figurative one.

What's most striking and touching about the notes is their politeness, even in the briefest examples:

Hand over your money please

and


**Put the money in the bag, now.
Thanks.**

New Audi ad celebrates car brand's heritage (12)

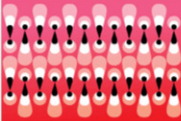
Butcher's Hook make their mark (36)

Olympic Torch wins Design of the Year (1)

A welcome new design event (1)



CR iPad app →



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