

Avoid the fluff: writing for the web

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Avoid the fluff: writing for the web

This presentation will offer tips on how to write web content that delivers. Takeaways include:

1. How to satisfy your visitors' goals.
2. How to create web content that's part of a conversation, not a rambling monologue.
3. How to market on the web by providing users with factual information as quickly and easily as possible.



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Sources

Letting Go of the Words: Writing Web Content that Works

by Janice Redish

Website Reading: It (Sometimes) Does Happen

from the Nielsen Norman Group.



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- Traditional marketing specializes in “push.” Pushing information out to potential customers (brochures, advertising, direct mail).



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- “Push” does exist on the web, but most web contacts are “pull.”
- Visitors come to your site to pull information — and you must satisfy that information need before you market to them.
- Marketing departments often think in terms of how to draw people in. On the web the primary concern is **not to drive people away.**



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- **You have 10 seconds** — the first 10 seconds are critical to a visitor's decision to stay.
- "Users are extremely skeptical, having suffered countless poorly designed web pages in the past. People know that most web pages are useless, and they behave accordingly to avoid wasting more time than absolutely necessary on a bad page."

— Jakob Nielsen



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- Reading is the primary action people perform on websites.
- Many people strive to read as little as possible on most of the websites they hit.
- Even on information pages, they skim and scan before they start to read.



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- Visitors come to a web site to satisfy goals, to do tasks, to get answers to questions.
- If your site does not help them do this, they will go somewhere else.



Avoid the fluff: writing for the web

1. Write for your readers.



1. Write for your readers

Before

We have also developed a [Privacy & Security Toolkit](#) for physicians to educate them about federal and state medical privacy and security laws, including the changes required by Texas HB 300 and its most recent changes made by Senate Bills 1609 and 1610, which were all codified into the Texas Medical Privacy Act.

The [Privacy & Security Toolkit](#) is designed to minimize the impact of these privacy laws on physicians' practices, and is available on a modular or bundled basis along with this Fall Seminar for a discounted cost.



1. Write for your readers

After

We have also developed a [Privacy and Security Toolkit](#) to educate physicians about new federal and state medical [privacy and security laws](#).

The [Toolkit](#) is designed to minimize the impact of these laws on physicians. It is available at a discounted rate when you [register for the Fall Seminar](#).



Avoid the fluff: writing for the web

2. Think conversation, not rambling monologue



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- Good web writing is like a conversation; it answers people's questions; and it lets people grab and go.



2. Think conversation, not rambling monologue

Before

When contacting a licensing board for the first time, ask for a copy of its current licensing requirements and the average time it takes to process applications. This will provide the physician with a solid idea of when to consider closing an existing practice and/or plan a move as addressed in completing an application.



2. Think conversation, not rambling monologue

After

Contact the licensing board where you want to practice. Ask for a copy of its current licensing requirements and the average time it takes to process applications.

Reading the requirements will help you understand any potential problems you may have in applying. Finding out about the processing time will help you plan when to close your current practice or when to move.



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3. Use the words your audience would use when describing your product.



3. Use the words your audience would use when describing your product

Use your web users' words. Don't try to sound impressive by using big words. If those words aren't the ones readers know, they won't be impressed. They'll give up on your website and go to another site that speaks their language.



3. Use the words your audience would use when describing your product

- Avoid jargon
- Spell out and define acronyms
- If your content is highly technical, link to pages that have simplified explanations



3. Use the words your audience would use when describing your product

Malpractice insurance or
medical professional liability insurance



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**4. Use simple words, active verbs,
and meaningful modifiers**



4. Use simple words

- The use of unfamiliar or complex terms interferes with comprehension and slows readers down. Readers may even skip terms they don't understand, hoping to find their meaning in the rest of the sentence.
- If your visitors don't find what they are looking for, they will go somewhere else.



4. Use simple words

Complex terms and their simpler alternatives

Instead of

advantageous

ameliorate

cognizant

commensurate

consolidate

deleterious

disseminate

endeavor

erroneous

Try

helpful

improve

aware

equal

combine

harmful

issue, send

try

wrong



4. Use simple words

Instead of

facilitate
inception
implement
leverage
optimize
prescribed
proficiencies
promulgate
proximity
regarding
remuneration
subsequently

Try

ease, help
start
carry out
use
perfect
required
skills
issue or publish
near
about
reward, payment
after or later



4. Use active verbs

As the new year commences, we are leveraging our core competencies as we endeavor to meet our customers needs.



4. Use active verbs

Instead of

accompany
ballpark
commence
consolidate
dialogue
disseminate
endeavor
enumerate
facilitate
ideate
implement
incentivize

Try

go with
estimate
begin
join
talk
give, send
try
count
lead, help
think
carry out, start
motivate



4. Use active verbs

Instead of

peruse
promulgate
regarding
remunerate
synergize
utilize

Try

read
issue, publish
about
pay
work together
use



4. Use meaningful modifiers

- Use only those adjectives or adverbs that add real meaning to your text.
- Which word provides a better description of a puppy: *brown* or *cute*?



4. Use meaningful modifiers

Here are some modifiers that have been drained of their meaning through overuse and misuse.

- actually
- amazing
- awesome
- complex
- effective
- efficient
- epic
- exciting
- exclusive
- ground-breaking
- historic
- iconic
- incredible
- innovative



4. Use meaningful modifiers

More meaningless modifiers

- insane
- interesting
- literally
- natural
- nice
- outstanding
- proactive
- progressive
- unique
- really
- revolutionary
- ridiculous
- very



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5. Avoid circumlocution



5. Avoid circumlocution

Circumlocution is the use of many words when one will do. For example, writing “at this point in time” when “now” will work.

Before

Due to the fact that sales have increased at this point in time, we are declaring a 12% dividend.

After

Because sales have now increased, we are declaring a 12% dividend.



5. Avoid circumlocution

Phrases you can replace with one word

Instead of

afford an opportunity
as a means of
at this point in time
due to the fact that
during the period
has a requirement for
in a timely manner
in accordance with

Try

allow, let
to
now
because
during
needs
quickly, promptly
by, following, per,
under



5. Avoid circumlocution

Instead of

in accordance with
in advance of
in regard to
in the amount of
in the event that
in the near future
no later than June 1
pertaining to
provides guidance for
under the provisions of
until such time as
with reference to
with the exception of

Try

by, following, per, under
before
about, concerning,
for
if
shortly, soon
by June 1
about
guides
under
until
about
except



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6. Writing informally is not dumbing down



6. Writing informally is not dumbing down

- It's writing so that busy people can understand what you're saying the first time that they read it.
- You can be professional and informal at the same time.
- Show that you are a person and your organization includes people.
- Talk *to* your web site visitors. Use *you*.
- If you are writing for an organization, use *we*, *us*, and *our*.



6. Writing informally is not dumbing down

When you use simple terms and eliminate complexities, your site accommodates:

- busy people
- impatient people
- the aging population
- people who read English as a second language
- people who have low literacy
- even the most educated people rarely complain that a website's writing style is too simplistic



6. Writing informally is not dumbing down

Before

The student must register and the fee payment process started before the first day of classes each semester or the student will be purged from classes. A late fee is assessed if a student re-registers after the first day of class.



6. Writing informally is not dumbing down

After

You must register and pay for your classes before the first day of class. If you don't, you will be dropped from your classes. We charge a late fee if you re-register after the first day of class.



Avoid the fluff: writing for the web

7. Market by giving useful information



7. Market by giving useful information

Take the lead from content marketing

- Content marketing involves the creation and sharing of content for the purpose of acquiring customers. It is the art of communicating with customers and prospects without selling.
- And this is what you want to do with website content.



7. Market by giving useful information

- On the web, market by giving users factual information as quickly and easily as possible. Because web users are so goal-oriented, they don't want to be distracted by irrelevant information.
- Use balanced language, not over-the-top sales pitches.
- Do not try to tease the user. Do not try to build excitement as you lead up to your point.





7. Market by giving useful information

Man takes first steps on moon

American Neil Armstrong has become the first man to walk on the moon. The astronaut stepped onto the moon's surface, in the Sea of Tranquility, at 0256 GMT, nearly 20 minutes after first opening the hatch on the Eagle landing craft.



7. Market by giving useful information

As Jakob Nielsen says . . .

“Give away the farm. First. The whole farm: cows, plows, chicks, the silo — everything.”



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And remember, if they can't find it on your website, they will go somewhere else.



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Resources

Letting Go of the Words: Writing Web Content that Works by Janice Redish

Content Rules by Ann Handley and C.C. Chapman

Publications from the Nielsen Norman Group
www.nngroup.com

Ragan Communications
www.ragan.com

Impertinent Remarks
www.impertinentremarks.com



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