

# MASTERCLASS

## How to create winning web content

This month's continuing professional development guide focuses on marketing content for the web.

**Kate Hilpern** discovers how to create clickable copy, compelling multimedia and unmissable online ads

**C**ontent is the unsung hero of the web. Although the "techie" achievements often get all the glory, there are many ways marketers can use content to attract new prospects, inform pre-conversion customers, deepen existing relationships and streamline customer journeys.

### Copywriting

People navigate web pages differently to the way they read print, notably tending to scan content rather than read word for word. "In usability studies you can watch people's eye and mouse movements to see how they move around sites," explains Phil Woodford, CIM affiliate member and University of the Arts London lecturer in copywriting and creative writing.

"Summarise messages in short bite-sized chunks that people can read at a glance," says Woodford. "Flag up essential content in the area that's visible when your reader first opens up their browser window. While you should always use web copy to its full advantage by linking to other content, don't make the mistake of directing readers away from your pages to someone else's site. They may never come back."

Aim to catch your readers' attention in the first few words and always start with the conclusion, advises Trenton Moss, director at consultancy Webcredibles. "Stick to one idea per paragraph and use descriptive sub-headings, put important words in bold and use bulleted lists to break up text," he adds. Further, deeper information can be provided for readers who want more detail through embedded links such as "read more" or "download article". "The BBC news website is a good example," says Moss.

Jon Spree, managing director of web design agency Pingala Media, believes it's essential to keep the overview pages clean, simple to follow and flexible – regularly changing the focal point of your business. "A common mistake is weighting each service or product equally on the page with nice graphics. The monotone structure means certain areas of the site may be lost," he says.


### SEO

Search engine experts recommend that keywords should constitute anything up to 10 per cent of your total copy, using the Google Keywords tool to find the most popular online search terms. But others urge caution, pointing out that there's nothing worse than a site crammed full of obvious, repetitive search terms. You may drive

traffic, but what about the brand experience when people arrive?

"The idea of stuffing as many keywords into your web copy as possible is outdated," says Guy Levine, CEO of digital marketing agency Return On Digital. "Key word density was dropped as a ranking factor a long time ago. Google is looking for context between the search someone makes and the copy it finds on the page. To do this it looks for far more than just keywords," he says.

When optimising website copy, says Levine, the first step is to pick your most generic and traffic-driving keywords because these are best for your homepage. "It is best to pick four to six because with any more you are spreading yourself too thinly. If you want more keywords, add more pages," he says.

"The next step is to think about themes. Google will not only look at keywords, it will also know that if your main keyword is 'holidays,' there should be mention of 'travel' or 'vocational' or 'beach', for example, so it is important to add copy around the subject," he says. "This is how search engines can crack down on 'spammy' content." 



"Finally," says Levine, "use links in your copy to spread the 'link juice' to your other pages and to aid browser navigation."

Metadata has also changed dramatically, he says. "Best practice is to write your title tags with your most important keywords and not your brand, but it is also important to know that Google can dynamically change your meta description to match the search by picking the content it believes is most relevant."

The Google Instant search enhancement has also changed the way keywords work (see p41) because the order of the words in your keyword phrases decides whether they are shown in the result, adds Levine.

"Ideally your targeted keyword phrases will be in the suggestions from the first keyword that a searcher types," he says.

In addition to the content itself, factors such as friendly URLs, navigation, accessibility and language all have an effect on whether a link falls on the first or third page of search results, points out Tim Norman, a director at SDL Web Content Management Solutions. "Simple, clear and relevant URLs, breadcrumbs and sitemaps make it easy for search engines to enter the navigation structure. That said, content authors should not be burdened with these technicalities – use a content management system that makes it simple to manage, modify and translate the site structure and URL as needed," he says.

## Search ad copy

Overlooking ad copy for search engines is the digital equivalent of building a beautiful shop in a back alley and then forgetting to put a street sign in place to let people know where it is, says Martin McNulty, general manager of Forward 3D. "You wouldn't do it in the physical world, so don't do it in the virtual one."

Before you draft your copy, put yourself in your customers' shoes and make sure your copy accurately reflects their needs, he advises. "The closer you are able to match their needs the more likely they are to click on your ads and the more likely they are to convert into a sale," says McNulty. "But stay away from including generic terms that your competitors will also be bidding on and which will mean the price per click



Graham Hansell

## Tips from the top

**1/ Devise content that can be shared.** Examples include BMI calculators for dieting and health, tax calculators for pensions and the latest technology white papers for software. Promote this content through trade contacts, national and trade press, industry bloggers, social networks and your newsletter. As these people link back to you, your audience grows.

**2/ Ensure your site content is fresh and focused.** Find ways to regularly add new copy and pages to your site. Examples include a news feed on the homepage and adding a blog that allows for comment on company products and wider news. Don't forget calls to action in any content you have on a website.

**3/ Know which keywords your audience is using to search.** Search engines don't buy anything, but

are a very powerful doorway to people who do. Therefore knowing the keywords your audience is using to search – through Google Insights ([www.google.com/insights/search](http://www.google.com/insights/search)) – tells you how to optimise your metadata and content.

**4/ Remember 2011 as the year of the mobile.** Positioning web content that can work across all platforms needs planning or a separate development project. A good example is Flash not showing on iPhones or iPads, effectively hiding valuable website content from users of these devices. A new and alternative standard, HTML 5, is promised to be supported by all of the smartphones, so is something to consider.

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increases. Instead include terms that are specific or unique to your offering."

Using specific terms means consumers who search using those terms are already engaged on the purchasing journey for your product or service and are therefore likely to

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make a purchase. You reduce the chance of having to pay for the clicks of people who have no intention of buying from you.

## Advert or advertorial?

For those who prefer the direct approach over search, there's still plenty of scope for display advertising online. Even Google is hedging its bets with "Watch this space", a new Adwords project that promises a revolution in online display.

But what constitutes an ad online is not straightforward. "The scale of advertising law and regulation is overwhelming in its scope and depth", admits Brett Farrell, associate at Barlow Robbins Solicitors. "There are laws that apply irrespective of the advertising used and there are laws that apply to specific channels of advertising only. But there are two prominent