

Writing for the Web

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A good copywriter is a master in the basics of writing—but that isn't good enough for effective web writing.

Write using keywords

Keywords are words and phrases people enter into search engines. Proper use of keywords will put your site at the top of search engine results pages (SERP). You need to know your key search terms and use them in your writing, particularly in headlines and meta tags. Resist keyword stuffing, that is using your keywords so much that the natural flow of your copy suffers. Search engine algorithms will figure you out fast and will penalize you for it. And most importantly, the human readers you've tried so hard to attract to your copy will be turned off and will click away.

Tag everything

Be sure to write descriptions and put tags on everything. Use page titles and descriptions. Tag charts, links, images and video—and put in a quick sentence for a description. Be sure to work your key words into all of your tags and descriptions.

Formatting is key to web writing

Use formatting to appeal to search engines. Search engines give more weight to copy that appears in headlines than it does in the body of a piece. Also, use keywords early in the paragraph and early in the sentence. In addition to helping your search engine optimization (SEO), formatting helps engage human readers. Web readers don't slog through thick copy; they scan content to see if it is relevant and they focus on those parts that are most relevant. Headlines facilitate scanning.

Write with simplicity and clarity

Short, simple sentences with a very clear purpose are the soul of good web copywriting. Don't bury the lead. Make your main point first, then support it with details. Some readers will remember Monty Hall and the "Let's Make a Deal" game show. Contestants got to choose curtain #1, #2, and #3. There never, ever was a curtain #4. Your copy should be similarly simple. Make a few key points. Make them clearly. And know exactly what one two or three things you want the reader to think or do. Too many concepts, too many words and clauses, and too many choices are bad copywriting.

Link. Link. Link.

Link your copy to other copy within the site, from outside in and from inside out. Links help your readers take a deep dive in subjects that interest them by following links. Links from other sites to yours bring you direct qualified traffic. Links are also highly valued by search engines, particularly inbound links—site that point people to your content. The search engines believe content that has more links is valued and valuable and will give your content a higher rank. Linking within your site helps the reader and search engines. Link to relevant content on your site and to older posts that add context and depth.

Write to engage people

Web readers are goal oriented. They want something and seek something. Cut out the fluff and focus. Use the active voice. Be accessible, real, conversational; use language your customers use, not internal terms. Avoid jargon, an alphabet soup of arcane initials, and impersonal brochure-speak. Speak to the reader and have some personality. Don't say, "Our quality is believed to be highly reliable by our clients." Say, "You can rely on our quality." Be a little provocative and avoid generalizations and generic corporate speak.

