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Content with your content

Copywriting for websites

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Whether you're a marketing novice or expert, you will have confronted the acronym W I I F (What's in it for me?). Never was this more the case than in preparing content for your website. The internet is a fickle master, growing exponentially by the day and providing viewers of your website with more choice and information than they can possibly digest. At current estimates, more new and unique information will be generated this year than over the previous 5,000 years!

In simple terms this means that, when it comes to copywriting for websites it is vital to put yourself in the viewer's position and take into account known user behaviours. If your site doesn't engage an audience or communicate your message quickly and efficiently, viewers simply click away ... never to return.

Your website's first impression

You have between 5 and 10 seconds to make an impact when someone clicks through to your website. Not much time, is it? For this reason, website writers prepare copy in a journalistic style, getting the meat across high on the page and adding detail later. As with newspapers, viewers tend to read only the first paragraph or 2, so don't leave anything critical to further down the page.

User skimming and scrolling

Some internet user behaviour is based on physical and some on lifestyle factors. For example, screen reading is around 25% more demanding. It takes longer and we blink less, which makes for rapid eye fatigue. On the other hand, most users are time poor and 'destinational' website viewers.

These factors (and others) mean website copy should be written taking into account that viewers are unlikely to scroll or to read the page content as they would printed matter. Keywords and phrases throughout the copy are essential in countering the tendency to scan pages for relevant detail. Word count is important to maximise the number of occasions on which the entire page appears on screen at once. If necessary, bigger pages can be broken up into several smaller ones.

Website content presentation

Even the catchiest headlines and the most gripping web copy won't get read without putting some effort into presentation and readability. Following are a few tips and tricks to getting it right:

- Website copy is often referred to as 'punchy' because the niceties are minimised. Use very short sentences and eliminate filler words.
- Acres of text is a real turn-off. Break down content into more easily managed chunks and introduce fitting and interesting images.
- Include titles that give readers an idea of what the paragraph contains. Good copywriting should give the reader a page overview by simply reading the headlines.
- Bring out points clearly with bullets but be careful not to overdo it. 4 or 5 at once is more than enough.
- Remember that no matter how good your planning is, viewers won't browse your website in a given order. Cross-reference throughout and add the appropriate links.

In summary

Internet users have access to more new information now than ever before in history. They are free to click in and out of websites swiftly and at almost any page location. To capture and hold viewers, website copy should be written in a style suitable to the medium and taking into account known user behaviour. Investing time in planning and presenting appealing, easily read website content will repay site owners with improved traffic volume and sales.

Profile

Anne Macindoe is a freelance copywriter based in Melbourne. She has authored page 1 ranking website content and also writes advertising, brochures, articles, newsletters press releases and so on. Email Anne at mail@cluey.com.au for quality copywriting to raise your profile, increase sales and focus your message or phone direct on 0414 920792.