

Writing for The Web

#1

7 Challenges every Writer and Copywriter
faces when writing for the Web

By Nick Osborne, May 2005
www.excessvoice.com

Cover art: Johanne Tanguay

Preface

This is the first in a series of short guides on writing for the web.

In this first guide I look at seven of the challenges writers and copywriters face when working on web sites.

When I say “challenges”, I don’t mean you necessarily have to struggle over all these points. They are challenges principally because the internet is a distinct, unique medium, and makes demands that are not familiar to us from the offline world of writing and copywriting.

I hope you find this guide useful. If you would like to know when future guides become available, watch for announcements in the Excess Voice Newsletter.

If you aren’t an Excess Voice subscriber, you can [sign up here](#).

Nick Osborne

May, 2005

Introduction

For writers, the web is a unique medium. It is not the same as writing for print or other offline media.

This means every writer and copywriter working online needs to understand the distinct challenges the web presents.

In this guide I look at seven areas of web writing that require skills and expertise you probably won't have developed in the offline world.

The best online writers and copywriters understand and address these challenges. This is part of what makes writing online such a pleasure. It is different, it is unique...and that makes for a stimulating learning curve for any writer who wants to master this relatively new medium.

In this short document I will address seven of those challenges.

1. You need to help every visitor avoid getting lost
2. You need to write for the company, your readers AND the search engines
3. You need to earn your visitors' trust
4. You need to write every page as a landing page...or not
5. You need to make your content pre-sell
6. You need to make the sale before it's too late
7. You need to know that web designers are not always on your side

Do these issues apply to every site, regardless of the size or nature of the company or organization? Pretty much. The only consistent exception I can think of is the single-page web sites that sell just one or two products or services. These sites are in a genre of their own and call more on the traditional skills of a direct marketing copywriter.

It's the multi-page web sites that present such an interesting challenge.

I hope you enjoy this short guide. If you have any suggestions or comments you would like to share with me, feel free to email me at nick@excessvoice.com

Challenge #1:

You Need to Help Every Visitor Avoid Getting Lost

From a visitor's point of view, web sites are very hard to use.

In the real world, if I step inside a corner store, I can see at a glance where to find what I want. Even if I visit Wal Mart it will take me only a few seconds to get a general idea of where to find what I want. And if I can't, I'll just ask the greeter.

If I receive a catalog, I know how it "works". I know the "architecture" of every catalog I will ever receive. How come? Because they are all constructed in the same way. They have a spine of some sort, a front cover and a series of pages which I can turn one at a time or flip through.

The same for a magazine, newspaper or book. I also know how to "use" any and every piece of direct mail I receive. I open the envelope and find a letter, brochure, response card and lift note – or some variation on that familiar combination of elements.

But, as a communication and sales medium, web sites have two distinct and unique attributes that make them extremely challenging to every first time visitor.

1. **You can see only ONE page at a time.** You can't flip through the whole site, as you can with a brochure. You can't take the site in with a single glance, as you can at your corner store.

This is a huge problem both for our visitors and us, as site creators.

As visitors find their way through our sites they are **always** seeing just one page at a time. They're not sure where they are going next, nor do they necessarily remember where they have just been.

2. **Every web site is put together differently.** There is no single, recognized format or template for web sites. Meanwhile, every magazine works in the same way. Same with stores. Same with catalogs. Same with magazines and books. This means

that when you pick up a magazine you never have to look at it and ask yourself, “Geez, I wonder how THIS magazine works.” They **all** have front covers followed by a series of sequential pages.

Not so with web sites. Every web group sits down and figures out how to organize the information on their new site. They work out the hierarchy of pages. They decide where to place the principle section links for the site, often with subcategories within each.

This means every new visitor to your site has to scratch his or her head and ask the question, “OK, I wonder how on earth I can find my way through **this** site.”

In other words, every new visitor is lost. They have no idea how you have put your site together. They have to figure that out.

What this means:

1. This means you need to spend less time on how YOU would like to organize your site, and a lot more time on building your site in a manner that is as familiar, intuitive and logical as possible for new visitors.
2. This means that the headings, subheads and links need to be descriptive and clear. You need to use words to help make it **VERY** clear where people are, and how they can move forward to find what they want.
3. This means you have to understand what it is the majority of your visitors are trying to achieve on your site. It is likely, for many sites, that **80% of your visitors will want to complete one of three or four different tasks**. Identify those three or four tasks and then create very simple pathways through your site for each of them. Help your visitors stay on track. Understand their needs and use helpful text to guide them forward.

An example of the 80% Rule:

automotive.com
where your car search begins™

Get a quote on all new cars! Compare prices and values, or read in-depth reviews on all the latest cars. Buying online through us could save thousands off the manufacturer suggested retail price of your new car! List your used cars in our classifieds for just \$29.99 until the day it sells. Receive free quotes on loans or extended warranties on all cars. Automotive.com is the web's automotive resource for both new and used cars.

NEW CARS USED CARS SELL FEATURES INSURE AUTO LOAN CERTIFIED FORUMS

Used Cars

Cars For Sale, Reviews & Classifieds

New Cars

New Cars, Invoice Prices, and Reviews!

SEARCH USED CARS
Search our classifieds and find used cars for sale:
Select Make [v]
Select Model [v]
98765 [GO]

AUTO LOAN QUOTE
If you're ready to finance your car, we'll get you a free quote on a loan with a competitive APR.
98765 [GO]

NEW CAR PRICING
Negotiate like a pro! Get multiple car price quotes:
Select Make [v]
Select Model [v]
98765 [GO]

INSURANCE QUOTE
You could save hundreds on your insurance premiums every year! Request a free quote to find out exactly how much.
98765 [GO]

Certified Pre-Owned Cars
The only & best way to buy a used car! Find the perfect used car and buy with confidence. [Click Here for Certified Pre-Owned Cars!](#)
presented by Audi

Used Car Specials
• 1994 Chevrolet C2500 \$8,995 Peoria, AZ
• 1999 Pontiac Grand AM

THIS WEEK AT AUTOMOTIVE.COM

Meet The Winner Of Our Audi Giveaway!
Did your favorite cars win? What was the most anticipated car for 2005? Were you the winner of a brand new Audi!? [more](#)

Auto Insurance Buying Guide
If you know what you want, let's get to the bottom line: how much will it cost you? You're a few clicks away from finding the answer. [more](#)

REVIEWS: [New 2005 Ford Mustang Review](#)
If ever a car illustrated how out of touch a company can be with its customers, it's the Mustang. It wasn't long ago that an... [more](#)
More: [Ford Escape Review](#) | [Ford Thunderbird Review](#) | [More Reviews...](#)

RESEARCH CATEGORIES
 [Compact Cars](#)
 [Midsize Cars](#)
 [Sports Cars](#)
 [Luxury Cars](#)
 [MiniVans/Vans](#)
 [SUVs](#)

My guess is that about 80% of the visitors to automotive.com want to search for or get loans for used cars, or get pricing or an insurance quote for new cars.

Do you see how simple they make it for each visitor to identify the best way forward? And do you see how each of the four boxes, high on the first screen of the home page, also includes drop-down menus that help visitors get exactly where they want to go, as quickly as possible?

Related Resources:

Articles:

[Help, Help, Help, Sell](#)

Reviews:

[Make Your Content Pre-Sell](#)

This e-book by Ken Evoy covers a lot of ground, but is essentially about writing great content. And it's excellent. Ken is one of the very, very few people I know who sees the process of writing online within the broader context and demands of the online user experience, design, site navigation, SEO and more.

[Read my review...](#)

[Secrets of Writing for the Internet](#)

This course is for copywriters, marketers and entrepreneurs who want to learn how to apply the proven principles of direct marketing to the web, email and newsletters. Hundreds of pages of invaluable information.

[Read my review of Secrets of Writing for the Internet](#)

Challenge #2:

You Need to Write for The Company, Your Readers AND the Search Engines

There are two or three audiences you need to please when you are writing a web site. And they often have conflicting needs.

First, you have the needs of the company that is paying for the site.

Maybe it's a lone entrepreneur. Maybe you'll be dealing with the web group manager from a large company.

Regardless, they have some things they want to say. They have some priorities. They want certain messages included, even highlighted. They have their own favorite copy lines, their own favorite topics and their own favorite graphics.

In other words, when you sit down to write a site, you have to listen to the people who pay you to do the work.

Second, you have the needs of your visitors and the search engines.

Interestingly, and a lot of people don't see it this way, both your visitors and the major search engines like Google are in search of the same thing...**RELEVANCE**.

How come? Because the search engines look at the words and phrases PEOPLE type into their search bars. And then the search engines list and display the most relevant pages for those words or phrases.

The nature of the conflict

Search engine listings and human searches are based on the language people use when looking for something online.

However, the language used by business owners and web groups may be very different.

For instance, the company may want to say:

“We deliver an integrated suite of digital printing solutions.”

On the other hand, someone looking for their printing services may type into the Google search bar something like:

“brochure printing”

Will Google send “brochure printing” searchers to your “digital printing solutions” page? Probably not.

As writers and copywriters online we have to deal with the traditional, ingrained language preferences of our employers and clients – while at the same time trying to serve the “relevancy” priority of our prospects and the search engines.

What should you do?

That’s simple. You should fight a little for what you know works best online.

Vague language has no place on the web. The language you use should be the language that is recognized by and familiar to your visitors.

What this means:

This means you need to take a whole different approach to writing pages for the web.

To write well for a business web site, you have to forget about the writing styles used in that same company’s print materials.

In particular, you have to put aside all the marketing-speak and sales lines. Sales copy does have its place online – on the pages where you are trying to close the sale. But on the home page and second or third level pages, your visitors are hoping to recognize the terms, phrases and words THEY use.

These are the terms that will signal to your visitor that your page is RELEVANT to their search. These same terms will let Google understand the content of your page and list it accordingly.

Remember, neither Google nor your visitors can make head or tail of a term like “integrated suite of digital printing solutions”.

The phrase is too vague for Google to figure out where and how high to list it. It is too vague for visitors to figure out what you’re really trying to tell them. Do you actually print brochures, books, posters, flyers? It’s impossible to tell.

What both the search engines and your visitors really appreciate are single-topic pages that use the language of the people searching for them.

This means you have to apply a whole different approach and discipline when writing for the web.

An example of nonsense:

“Our Internet support infrastructure automatically collects information from the user's system, facilitates effective communication between support personnel and users, and enables self-healing and automated problem resolution.”

This text is not made up, but is taken from a web site selling Customer Relationship Management services.

Do you understand what they are trying to say?

And what do you think a search engine would make of this text? Do you think Google would know where to list this page?

The company would have been better off saying something like, “We’ll help you build an excellent customer support system”.

Related Resources:

Articles:

[Google: The Ultimate Web Writer's Style Guide](#)

Reviews:

[Twaking Your Site's Copy to Get More Search Engine Traffic](#)

This is a 'How To' kit from Marketing Sherpa - on how to optimize your site pages with the best keywords and phrases. It comprises two reports and one interview transcript. It's great stuff. A report each from Jill Whalen and Karon Thackston. And the transcript of an interview with Jill Whalen. Plenty of examples and screenshots. Lots to learn.

[Read my review...](#)

[Wordtracker: Find the Most Profitable Keywords for Your Site](#)

Here's a tool I use on an almost daily basis. Working from a database of over 350 million terms, it helps me identify the most profitable key words and phrases for Google, Yahoo!, MSN, Overture and a host of other search engines and directories. Using Wordtracker has had a huge impact on the ranking of my sites across a number of engines.

[Read my review...](#)

Challenge #3:

You Need to Earn Your Visitors' Trust

If you go to your corner store, you'll probably recognize someone behind the counter. There is a human there. Someone you know.

If you buy through direct mail from a large company like VISA, you know the company. You feel an implicit trust in so far as credit card services are concerned.

If you buy from QVC on late night TV, you feel comfortable because QVC has been on TV for ever. You recognize the name and brand. You feel pretty confident about them delivering what they say they'll deliver.

But what about less well-known companies online? What about those companies which are not a top 500 world brand? What about the companies online you have never heard of, but seem to have exactly what you are looking for?

A moment's hesitation before you type in your credit card number? I think so. After all, **who ARE those guys?**

It's a cold place online...

The web as a medium is all technology. There are no people there. You can't get to "know" anyone behind the counter. You're just clicking buttons and links, finding what you want and then being asked to place your money in the hands of an organization you know absolutely nothing about.

What this means:

There are a few practical steps you can take, like including a phone number, adding a Better Business Bureau logo and highlighting your money-back guarantees.

However, there is something else you can do as well. You can write in a more personal and reassuring tone.

This is about “**being there**” on your site by introducing a human voice to some of the text you write.

You don’t have to go crazy with this. Some fairly light touches can make all the difference.

It’s a matter of writing a little less how you might write a brochure and a little more like how you might speak to a friend or colleague.

Remember this:

When most people log on to the internet they don’t rush straight into ecommerce sites. They read their emails and maybe answer a few. They may check out some discussion groups or lists they belong to. Maybe they add some comments of their own. More and more will perhaps add an entry to their own blog.

This is the nature of people’s lives online. They are interacting with other people. They are reading emails, blogs and forums in which people write in their own, personal voices. Your customers and prospects are also publishers themselves, whether writing emails, replying to discussion group entries or updating their blogs.

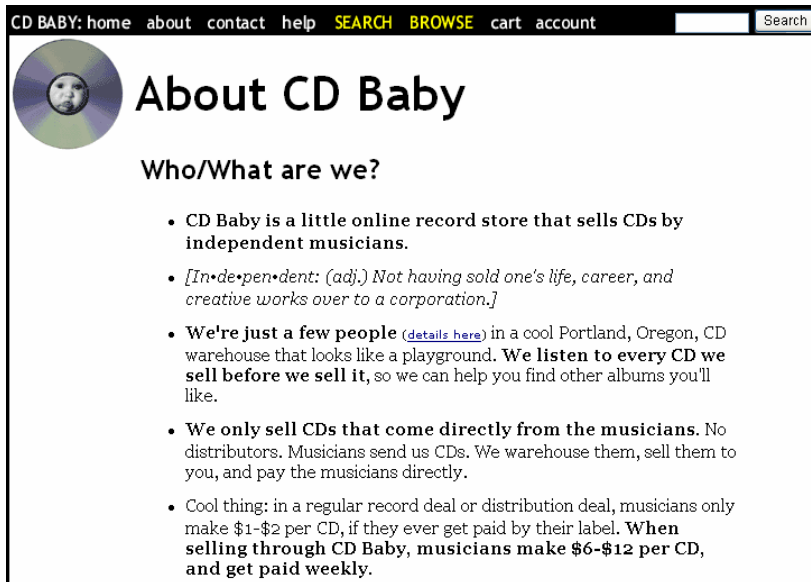
In other words, for most people, the internet is a place filled with personal voices. It is the nature of the medium.

Sometimes these people will come to a commercial site. Maybe they want to buy a DVD, a flight, some shoes, a report.

But when they start reading the text on most ecommerce sites, they bump into a voice that is completely impersonal. A distance is immediately created between the reader and the company. Again, “who are these guys”?

If you want to build long-term relationships with your readers and customers, you would do well to adjust the tone of your writing to include a personal element. Help your readers understand and feel that there are real people working in your online “store”. Just like at the corner shop.

An example of a personal voice:



CD BABY: home about contact help SEARCH BROWSE cart account Search

About CD Baby

Who/What are we?

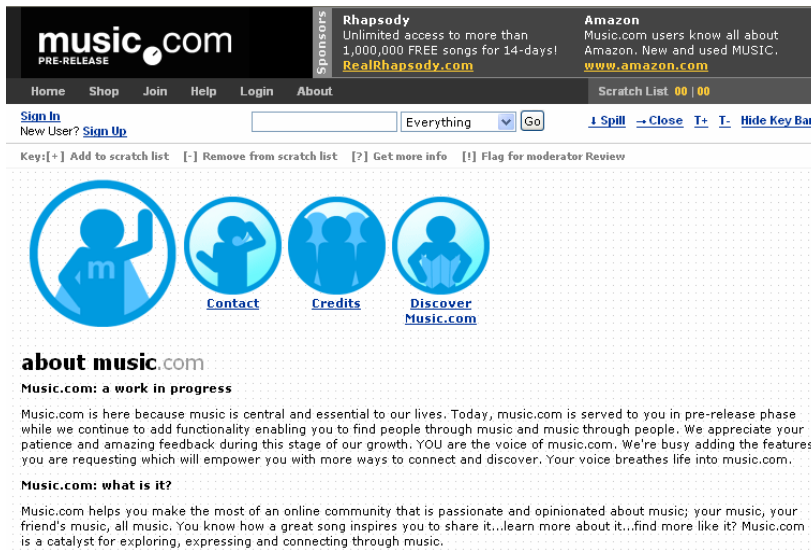
- CD Baby is a little online record store that sells CDs by independent musicians.
- [*In•de•pen•dent: (adj.) Not having sold one's life, career, and creative works over to a corporation.*]
- We're just a few people ([details here](#)) in a cool Portland, Oregon, CD warehouse that looks like a playground. **We listen to every CD we sell before we sell it**, so we can help you find other albums you'll like.
- We only sell CDs that come directly from the musicians. No distributors. Musicians send us CDs. We warehouse them, sell them to you, and pay the musicians directly.
- Cool thing: in a regular record deal or distribution deal, musicians only make \$1-\$2 per CD, if they ever get paid by their label. **When selling through CD Baby, musicians make \$6-\$12 per CD, and get paid weekly.**

You can tell that this text has been written in a deliberate, personal voice. The whole personality of the site and business shines through. You know right away that there are real people working here. Their attitudes and personalities are clearly reflected in the tone of what they write.

Do you have to go this far? Do you have to become a “personality” online in order to reassure your customers? I don’t think so. A fairly light touch will do.

Just avoid being wooden, lifeless and corporate in how you write.

An example of a CD store with an impersonal voice:



music.com
PRE-RELEASE

Home Shop Join Help Login About

Scratch List: 00 | 00

Sign In
New User? Sign Up

Everything Go

Spill Close T+ T- Hide Key Bar

Key: [+] Add to scratch list [-] Remove from scratch list [?] Get more info [!] Flag for moderator Review

about music.com
Music.com: a work in progress

Music.com is here because music is central and essential to our lives. Today, music.com is served to you in pre-release phase while we continue to add functionality enabling you to find people through music and music through people. We appreciate your patience and amazing feedback during this stage of our growth. YOU are the voice of music.com. We're busy adding the features you are requesting which will empower you with more ways to connect and discover. Your voice breathes life into music.com.

Music.com: what is it?

Music.com helps you make the most of an online community that is passionate and opinionated about music; your music, your friend's music, all music. You know how a great song inspires you to share it...learn more about it...find more like it? Music.com is a catalyst for exploring, expressing and connecting through music.

It's not easy to read that small type. So here is the text of the first two sentences of body text...

“Music.com is here because music is central and essential to our lives. Today, music.com is served to you in pre-release phase while we continue to add functionality enabling you to find people through music and music through people.”

***Functionality?** Strange word for someone to use. I bet the writer wouldn't have used that word if he or she were talking about music.com to a friend or neighbor.*

Adding voice to your text isn't easy, but it can achieve great results. The key is to be genuine. Be true. Don't write in some “professional”, contrived, “personal” voice. Write in a truly personal way.

Related Resources:

Articles:

[Being Personal isn't About Being Their 'Buddy'](#)

Review:

[Secrets of Writing for the Internet](#)

This course is for copywriters, marketers and entrepreneurs who want to learn how to apply the proven principles of direct marketing to the web, email and newsletters. Hundreds of pages of invaluable information.

[Read my review of Secrets of Writing for the Internet](#)

Challenge #4:

You Need to Write Every Page as a Landing Page...Or Not

Imagine trying to write a book in the knowledge that you have no control over which page people will start reading.

Books, articles and, to some extent, sales letters depend on people starting at the beginning.

With a web site you may build your home page to make it very simple for people to identify the key topics on the site with clear descriptions of how to move forward.

However, what you can't control is whether your visitors will first arrive at your site through the home page.

Other sites and blogs will link to your interior pages, if those pages are interesting. Search engines will spider and list your interior pages and send visitors directly to those pages, bypassing your home page.

In fact, the concept of a “home page” is simply a useful and artificial construct of our own. We have a home page because we are used to other media – books, catalogs, magazines and newspapers – all having a front cover. In those cases we can be fairly confident that the front cover is the first thing people will look at. Not so with web sites.

What this means:

This means you have to write every page in the knowledge that it may be the FIRST page people see on your site.

There are obvious “must do” tasks here.

1. You must include your site-wide navigation tabs and links on every interior page.
2. You must write your headlines, subheads and links in the knowledge that your visitor may be better served by other

areas of the site. In other words, apply some of your “home page” thinking to every interior page as well.

But hang on...

What about those pages that really ARE stand-alone landing pages?

More and more online marketers are building landing pages to address traffic from pay-per-click listings or ads.

In other words, sometimes we specifically want an inbound link to take someone to a particular page that has been optimized to deliver a specific result.

In this case we DON'T want them to wander off elsewhere on the site.

If this is the case, then remove as many distractions and outbound links as you can. You WANT people to read ONLY this page.

Gets complicated, doesn't it?

You need to think this through carefully. Putting aside the ad campaign-specific landing page, you need to be very careful how you write your interior pages.

There are two things you need to balance.

1. For people who arrive at a second level page from a link on your **home page**, you need to keep the pathway forward very clear and logical. Moving people forward from your home page in a clear and disciplined way is a valuable skill and can significantly increase conversion rates.
2. But at the same time, consider the needs of those visitors who came **directly to this interior page**. Be aware of what they might be looking for. Don't write headlines and introductory text that **exclude** people who didn't arrive via the home page.

Every page is a landing page. The writing on every page has to serve two audiences: Those people who arrived from the home page or some other page on your site, and those people who came to that page directly from a search engine or some other inbound link.

Examples of strong, focused pages:

The regular GoToMyPc home page:

Log In
■ Home
How It Works
For You
For Your Company
About Us
Newsroom
Help

Email:
Password:
Log In
Forgot your password?

GoToMyPC
Access Your PC from Anywhere.™

GoToMyPC is the fast, easy and secure way to access your PC from any Web browser or wireless device in real time.

- Access files, programs, email and network
- Increase your flexibility and productivity
- Work on your office PC from home
- Travel and use your PC remotely

TRY IT BUY NOW

CITRIX
Acquires Expertcity

GoToMyPC Remote-Access Solutions:

For You **GoToMyPC™**
Single-User Account
[Learn More](#) | [Free Trial](#)

For Your Company **GoToMyPC™ PRO**
Multi-User Account
Basic Administration
[Learn More](#) | [Test Drive](#)

GoToMyPC News:
[Sharp and Citrix Online Form Alliance](#)
[ZDNET: Access Your PC from Afar](#)
[Financial Times: "Particularly Impressive"](#)

Contact | Recommend Us | Become a Partner Canada

This home page is much as you would expect it, providing a variety of options with a full set of navigation links, so visitors can make their own choices about what to read next. That said, the orange buttons do give a clue as to what the company would like those visitors to do.

A regular “free trial” page from GoToMyPc.

Here is an interior page on the site, offering a free trial. The global navigation area is there on the left, to serve both those visitors who might want to check out other areas of the site, and those visitors who may arrive at this page directly from a search engine listing.

A GoToMyPc “free trial” landing page from a pay-per-click advertisement:

Here is true “landing page”. The focus is on getting the visitor to do just ONE thing – sign up for a free trial. In this scenario, the purpose is to maximize the return on the cost of the pay-per-click ad and not even provide the option to explore other parts of the site.

What does all this have to do with the writer?

As a writer or copywriter you have to be aware both of the purpose of a page, how it flows from other pages, how it can stand alone as an entry page and how to write it to maximize results if it is a campaign-specific landing page. All these factors impact on how the text should be written.

Related Resources:

Articles:

[How To Write a Landing Page](#)

Reviews:

[Landing Page Handbook - How to Raise Conversions](#)

This report from MarketingSherpa is the first I have seen that provides solid data on what does and doesn't make a difference to landing page conversion rates. Tons of data on copy and design strategies. Dozens of before and after examples and the improvements achieved.

[Read my review...](#)

[Secrets of Writing for the Internet](#)

This course is for copywriters, marketers and entrepreneurs who want to learn how to apply the proven principles of direct marketing to the web, email and newsletters. Hundreds of pages of invaluable information.

[Read my review of Secrets of Writing for the Internet](#)

Challenge #5:

You Need to Make Your Content Pre-Sell

On the face of it, there are two kinds of writers required to write a good, multi-page web site. The content writer, who writes the “editorial” and informational pages. And the copywriter, who writes the promotional and sales text.

This isn’t a satisfactory situation, by any means. As the online industry matures, a new breed of writer will emerge. And these writers will have the skills to write both content and copy.

And that’s as it should be, because every block of content or editorial should also serve a promotional purpose, even if only to a very limited degree. And vice versa.

How can “content” be promotional?

Because good content pre-sells.

It’s as simple as that.

Think about those direct mail pieces you receive, promoting books or CDs on natural health care or fitness.

Their purpose is to sell, but a good direct mail sales piece also informs you. It tells you facts you didn’t know before. It alerts you to dangers about which you were not familiar. It introduces you to ideas and ways forward you hadn’t thought about.

Or think of Amazon.com and how they add a huge amount of content to each page through the use of customer reviews. Yes, there are some negative reviews. But by and large, the reviews pre-sell the books, CDs or whatever.

When people buy or sign up for something online, they need enough information in order to feel comfortable about making the purchase.

They need to feel they know enough to feel confident about their purchase decision.

This is where content comes in, and why even “editorial” needs to be written in such a way as to gently “pre-sell” the product or service.

A sales page will do the heavy selling, with whichever promises, offers and guarantees it takes to close the sale. But the content pages are also important – they gently put the reader in the right frame of mind to make them feel ready and comfortable enough to make the purchase.

What this means:

This means every writer online needs to be aware of the various stages of writing within a sequence of pages on a web site.

Imagine you’re writing on three levels – a home page, and “more information” page and a final sales page.

- **The Home Page** – On this page you will be writing brief text with the purpose of giving your visitors just enough information to help them know where to go next in order to find more information on the topic that interests them most.
- **The Pre-Selling Page** – This is on the second level. People arrive here after reading some short text on the home page. This is where you need to give them all the information they might need in order that they will feel comfortable about making the purchase. This is a “content” page, but written with the understanding that it also has a duty to pre-sell.
- **The Sales Page** – This is the third level. And by now your visitor has been pre-sold and is comfortable enough to part with his or her money. Now it’s your job to turn every “maybe” into a “Yes”. On this page you use sales language, offers, guarantees – whatever it takes.

The point is, to be an effective web writer, you have to wear a number of different hats, and you need to know when to wear each of them.

An example of content that pre-sells

Guides & Resources

Cable Guide: Get Connected

06/29/02

When you get your new toys home, you want to play with them, right? To start enjoying that new DVD player, VCR, TV or home theater receiver, you're gonna have to hook it up.

Making sure you use the best connection possible is extremely important. After all, you took the time to do some research, picked out just the right gear and spent your hard-earned money to get optimum performance.



Component Video Connection

Component video is superior to both S-video and composite video because it provides improved color purity, superior color detail, and a reduction in color noise and NTSC artifacts. The 3-plug video output of a DVD player sends/receives the luminance (Y) and 2 color signals, each on a separate colored RCA cable.

Good Choices:

[Monster Cable 1.5m Premium Component Video Cable](#)
[Monster Video 1.2m Component Video Cable](#)

[Back to top](#)

You can see how the text is primarily informational. But at the same time it is giving you the information you need in order to choose the product that is best for your needs. And then it finishes with a couple of links to some products you can buy. In other words, it is pre-selling.

If I click on that first link, I arrive at the sales page:

[Best Buy](#) > [Accessories](#) > [TV, Home Theater & Audio Accessories](#) > [Video Cables & Connectors](#) > [Video Cables](#) > Product Info



Monster Cable 1.5m Component Video Cable

Model: MV2CV

Your home theater is only as good as its weakest link. With this premium component video cable from Monster, you don't have to worry. It features 24K-gold connectors for corrosion resistance.

More Options

- [Compare with products in this price range.](#)

VIEW MORE PHOTOS

Our Price: ~~\$59.99~~

ADD TO CART

In Stock Usually ships in 1 business day
[Estimate arrival time.](#)

Available for pickup at most stores
[Select preferred store availability](#)

ADD TO WISH LIST

Product Specs

Product Features

- Low-loss cable for improved video reproduction
- Multistranded all-copper construction for a clear, sharp picture
- 24K-gold RCA connectors for superior connectivity and corrosion resistance

Product Details

Warranty Terms - Parts Limited Lifetime Replacement Warranty

On this page they are trying to get me to buy. They still include some more information, but also have a strong Add to Cart button and even an Add to Wish List button. The first page was pre-selling. This page is selling.

Related Resources:

Reviews:

[Make Your Content Pre-Sell](#)

This e-book by Ken Evoy covers a lot of ground, but is essentially about writing great content. And it's excellent. Ken is one of the very, very few people I know who sees the process of writing online within the broader context and demands of the online user experience, design, site navigation, SEO and more.

[Read my review...](#)

Challenge #6:

You Need to Make the Sale Before It's Too Late

The web is a very hard place through which to make sales.

You don't think so? Look at it this way. If a hundred people walk into a physical Wal Mart store, how many do you think will actually buy something before leaving? Ninety five? Ninety eight? Probably something like that.

Now think about a hundred people going to the Wal Mart web site. How many of them do you think will complete a purchase online? One? Two? My guess is that one or two percent is pretty close to the mark.

Do you still think it's easy to sell something online? I'm not saying there aren't advantages to doing business on the web. However, achieving even reasonable conversion rates is a real challenge.

In the world of retail ecommerce the conversion rate to completed sales is typically in the region of two to three percent.

And when you lose customers, you lose a lot of them during the check-out process.

Imagine those 100 people filling their shopping baskets in Wal Mart and then seeing maybe half of them changing their mind as they line up at the checkout, leaving their baskets on the floor and walking out of the store.

That's what happens on web sites.

What can you do to increase sales?

The answer lies in a combination of everything you have been reading so far. You have to make it easy for people to find what they are looking for. You need to tell them enough about your product or service to make them feel comfortable about the price you are asking.

And you need to do some pre-selling on those pages that lead up to the final “Buy Now” page.

And then...

And then you have to write like a direct marketer and sell, sell, sell!

That doesn't mean you should turn yourself into a late night infomercial selling maniac. You don't want the tone of the site's voice to dramatically change. You'll give people a horrible shock if you do that.

But you do need to close the sale.

What this means...

That means reminding your visitor of all the great reasons why this product or service is such a great deal.

It means writing strong sales text that encourages each person to **make the purchase right now**.

It means repeating your guarantee. It probably means including a toll-free number people can call. It means adding those Better Business Bureau logos, or equivalent.

On the final sales page you already have people almost completely persuaded. Now you just need to give them a nudge and make sure that you address every reason why someone might get cold feet at the last moment.

An example of a strong sales page:

web ceo
Move Your site to the Top

home how it works download prices support freeware earn cash

Home > Download

At the moment **115747** businesses rely on Web CEO.

Web CEO 5.5. - New Release (!!!)

If you are serious about search engine optimization, even the Free Edition of Web CEO 5 will help you:

- Increase traffic from search engines
- Understand visitors' behavior, get complete analysis of revenues and sales conversions, plus measure efficiency of ad campaigns
- Ensure your Web site is ultra-reliable

IMPORTANT: This version has no time limits and is fully functional. You can upgrade to a higher edition at any time. Even then, feel safe with the standard 30-days **Money-Back** Guarantee.

Important: [Upgrade instructions for previous versions of Web CEO](#)

GET YOUR FREE EDITION OF WEB CEO!
NO TIME LIMIT!
NO FORMS TO FILL OUT!

Download Now
One-click download: [webceo.exe](#)
[Size: 11,3 Mb; Time: ~25-2 min.]

What experts say:


Name: Kevin French
Company: MM2K, Inc

Why do you use Web CEO?

"It makes the difficult & time consuming task of search engine optimization easier and more manageable. I no longer need to switch between several different applications to perform a thorough analysis, optimization and submission of a site...
Moreover, Web CEO provides

There are a number of things worth noticing about this page. On the one hand, they don't have a phone number, and nor do they have any of those reassuring Better Business Bureau logos. However, they do a lot to try and close the sale. (And in this case the download is actually free.)

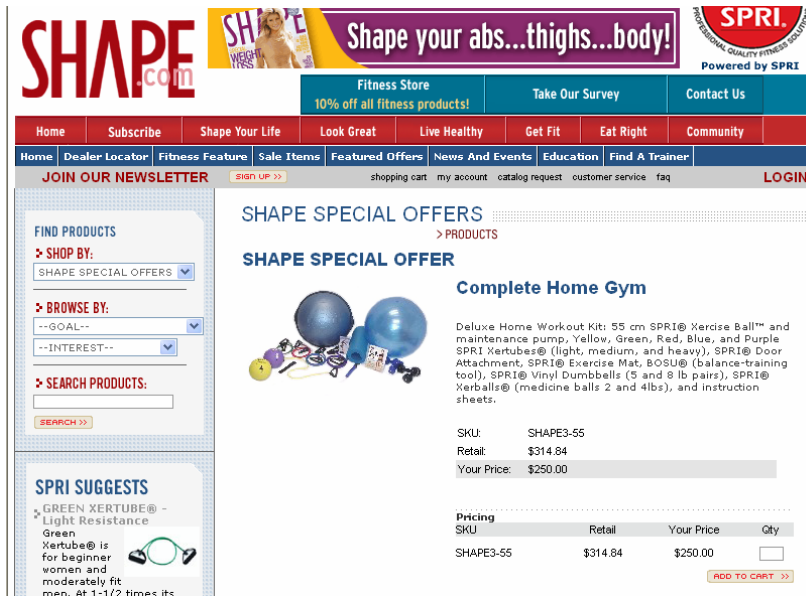
They show a testimonial, with a photo of a real person. They also, in the top right corner show the number of people who are using their service right now – 115,747. It's certainly reassuring to know that plenty of other people are using this product.

And take a look at the area around the product shot itself. See how they use plenty of short phrases to remove any perceived barriers to clicking the 'Download Now' button. "One-click Download". "Get Your Free Edition of WebCEO". "No Time Limit!" "No Forms to Fill Out".

Do you see what the writer is doing? He or she is looking at every possible angle, and removing all the reasons someone might choose not to go ahead. "Urgh, I hate those long forms I have to complete." "I hate those free downloads that are good only for 15 days." "I hate complicated download instructions."

This is how a sales page should be working. You ask for the sale, reaffirm the benefits of buying or downloading and make the prospect comfortable by overcoming possible objections.

An example of a weak sales page:



The screenshot shows the SHAPe.com website. The header features the SHAPe.com logo and a banner that says "Shape your abs...thighs...body!". Below the banner is a navigation menu with links like "Home", "Subscribe", "Shape Your Life", "Look Great", "Live Healthy", "Get Fit", "Eat Right", and "Community". A secondary menu includes "Dealer Locator", "Fitness Feature", "Sale Items", "Featured Offers", "News And Events", "Education", and "Find A Trainer".

The main content area is titled "SHAPE SPECIAL OFFERS" and features a "SHAPE SPECIAL OFFER" for a "Complete Home Gym". The product is described as a "Deluxe Home Workout Kit" including a 55 cm SPRI® Xercise Ball™, maintenance pump, and various other fitness equipment. The price is listed as \$250.00, with a retail price of \$314.84. A small "ADD TO CART" button is visible at the bottom right of the product description.

Pricing	Retail	Your Price	Qty
SKU			
SHAPE3-55	\$314.84	\$250.00	<input type="text"/>

Will I buy this home gym? Who knows. But I do know that they are not trying very hard to convert all those prospective buyers who are right on the edge of deciding. No guarantees, no special offer or gift, no phone number, no Better Business Bureau logo. No text that urges people to buy NOW. And the "Add to Cart" graphic is really small.

On a page like this you know you will be losing a lot of people who were right on the brink of buying. Your job as a writer is to say everything you can to make them feel comfortable, confident, safe and excited. This page doesn't achieve any of those things.

Related Resources:

Articles:

[3 Ways to Increase Conversion Rates](#)

Reviews:

[Michael Masterson's Accelerated Program for Six-Figure Copywriting](#)

This is the course I always recommend for anyone who wants to learn how to write copy that generates results. Perfect for direct marketers, and also excellent for online copywriters who want to increase conversion rates.

[Read my review](#)

[Secrets of Writing for the Internet](#)

This course is for copywriters, marketers and entrepreneurs who want to learn how to apply the proven principles of direct marketing to the web, email and newsletters. Hundreds of pages of invaluable information.

[Read my review of Secrets of Writing for the Internet](#)

Challenge #7:

You Need to Know that Web Designers are Not Always on Your Side

A curious thing happened when it was first decided how to form web development teams.

The marketing team was invited. The designer was invited. The programmer was invited. Even the usability experts were invited. But unfortunately, everyone forgot to invite the writer.

This was true in the mid-90s and, sadly, is still true today.

To my mind it should work in the same way as in an ad agency. When everyone sits down for the first time to create a TV commercial, a print ad or a retail campaign, the copywriter is included from the outset.

Today, online, too many web sites are designed without thinking about the message.

There is an irony here, of course. Of all media, the web is the place where our readers are very much focused on precisely that...READING.

For the vast majority of sites the most important element for your visitors is the text. They come to your site to READ. They want to find out if you have the information, products or services they are looking for.

The bottom line?

With very few exceptions, every page of every web site should have a primary design imperative: **Showcase the message to the best possible advantage.**

If that sounds like a weird thing for a designer to do, to “serve” the needs of the writer, go spend some time with a direct marketing designer. They know exactly what needs to be done. They understand

that the conversion rate of a direct mail piece will depend a great deal on how successful they are in showcasing the copy. That's their job.

Do direct marketing designers have less "ego" than web designers? I don't know. (Well, I actually think they do!)

If a web site is about maximizing conversion rates, the designer HAS to put aside ego, vanity and the desire to show off his or her own design talent.

The web is about words. And the words have to be presented well, so they are easy to read and help the visitor move forward towards achieving his or her goal.

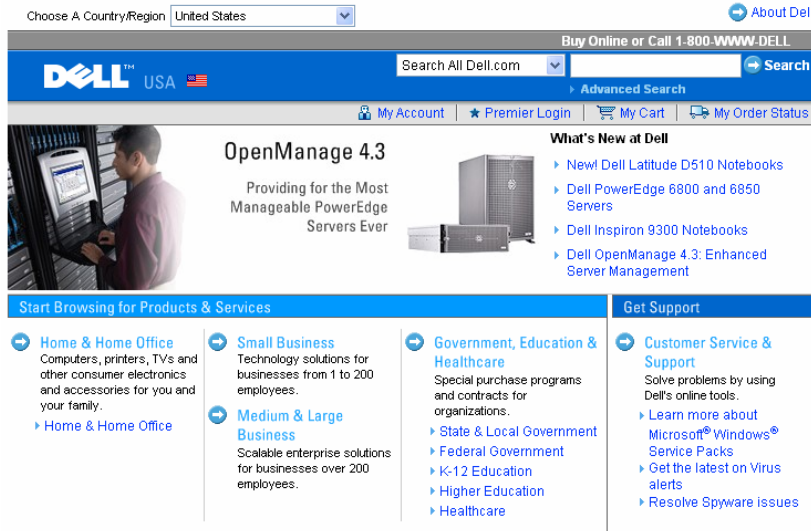
What this means...

For an online writer and/or copywriter this means you have to **fight**...in a constructive way.

If the web group leader, designer or entrepreneur doesn't understand how important it is that the design supports the copy, then you need to educate them.

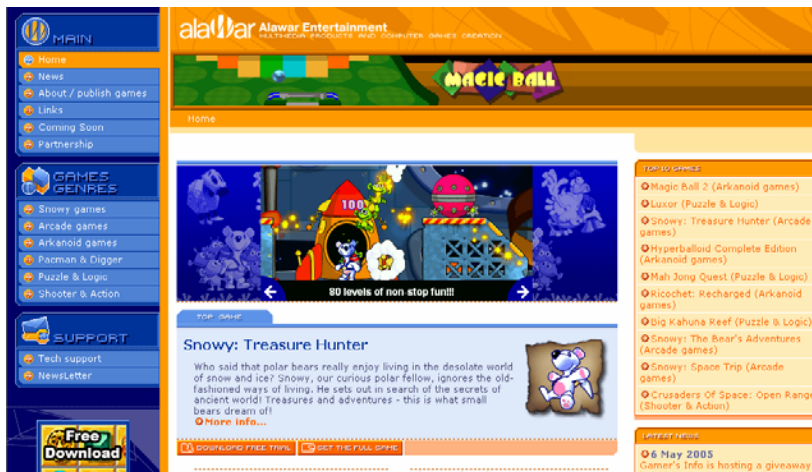
Show them examples of some sites that make it easy to read the important text, and show them some that make it hard.

An example of an easy-to-read page:



*The Dell.com home page is always easy to read. Their headings are short, but descriptive...giving you enough information to guide you forward to where you want to go next. See also how the text is placed on a white background, making it easy to read. The images and **graphic clutter** are kept to a minimum, so your eyes find it easy to locate the text you are looking for.*

An example of a hard-to-read page:



Now take a look at this page. Do you see the differences? Can you see any major headings or sub-heads to help you find what you are looking for? In fact, if you have never been to this site, can you see

any message that might help you figure out what these guys do? And take a look at that right side list of links...orange text on a salmon background. Is that as easy to read as the black text on a white background at Dell.com?

*This page was **not designed to showcase the message**. It wasn't designed to make it easy to find and read the text that is most relevant to the visitor's interests.*

Related Resources:

Articles:

[Web Design: Use it to Showcase the Message](#)

Reviews:

[Graphic Design Success](#)

This is a 500+ page course on direct marketing design. Perfect for designers and non-designers who want to create high-impact direct response sales letters, flyers, ads and more.

[Read my review](#)

Concluding thoughts:

For me, working in the online medium is a constant source of fascination.

With the web I am always aware that this is an interactive medium, in which the reader directs his or her own way forward or backwards.

I am aware that when a site owner is looking for some kind of result – a sale, a registration, a sign-up, a download or whatever, the conversion rates are painfully low.

I am fascinated by how readers and search engines make up their own minds as to which are the most important and interesting pages on a web site, often to the frustration of the site owners.

And with the growth of software and services which help us track, measure and test the performance of our sites, we can finally see what it is our visitors are looking and hoping for.

Best of all, when you write for the web, the experience draws you up a steep, constant and never-ending learning curve.

End Notes:

I hope you have found something of value in this short guide.

If you are looking for more information on writing for the web, you'll find plenty of articles and resource reviews at my site:

<http://www.excessvoice.com>

If you are a freelance writer or copywriter, or want to become one, you'll find a whole different collection of articles and resources at:

<http://www.freelancewritingsuccess.com>

Best wishes,

Nick Osborne

May, 2005