

Creating content

10 steps

Introduction

- Most small businesses don't have the budget to hire a team of professional designers, copywriters and search engine optimization experts to create ideal content. This can make it the owner or key partner's responsibility to create "the stuff" that goes on a website.
- The following 10 steps acts as a crash course in creating simple, clear and focused content for your website.

Step 1. Understand content is king

- A website isn't a valuable marketing tool unless you have well written content. If nobody is actually reading your website, and it isn't attracting the attention of search engines, then you aren't getting return on investment you deserve.
- Search engines (like Google, Yahoo and Bing) can find your website and "crawl" through the content on your pages looking for keywords in your text and other data.
- Using complex algorithms, the search engine decides what your website is about, and how high up on their list it gets placed. If a web page doesn't have many words on it, it will be moved to the back of the search results listing, making your site harder to find.
- Many small to midsize businesses still have only basic websites with either too little content (can't be searched) or too much content (users lose interest quickly) on them and seem to wonder why their website isn't providing them much return on investment.
- Example: <http://www.techcrunch.com/>
 - Just a blog?/Tech news/37 million page views per month/2 million friends and followers
 - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Page

Step 2. Research and basic structure

- Start by researching websites of businesses that are similar to yours. Search for competitors in your area as well as others in different locations. Pay attention to detail, and ask yourself the following questions:
 - What kind of sections (pages) do they have?
 - How many sections are there?
 - How many paragraphs are on each page?
 - Is it easy to read?
 - What keywords do they use? (Keywords are titles of topics included in a web page that would match words typed into a search engine.)
 - How many images do they use on the page?
 - Are the images relevant?
- NEVER copy images or words directly from other websites. Copyright law protects all websites from the instant they are uploaded on the Internet. To further discourage this, search engines actually search for duplicate content and will lower your search engine ranking because of it.
- Decide what type of pages you will need. (Examples - Company History, Products/Services/ Ordering Information, Contact etc.) It might be an idea to Organise these pages into sections.
- Examples
 - Meet the Team
 - <http://www.objectadjective.com/about/team/>
 - <http://www.chromaticsites.com/about-us>
 - <http://www.think.eu/who-we-are/our-people/>
 - About us
 - <http://www.seomoz.org/about>
 - <http://www.tumblr.com/about>

Step 3. Writing differently for the web

- Writing and preparing content for your website requires a different approach than writing content for printed publications. When you are writing "copy" (which is the term for the written material you create) for the web you need to keep several points in mind:
- You want your content to:
 - Grab attention
 - Be interesting and easy to read
 - Be keyword rich (for your search engine ranking)
- Why Writing Copy for the Web is Different
 - Studies have shown that most website users only read about 20%-28% of the text on a web page. As opposed to readers of newspaper/brochures and other print, Internet users have access to millions of websites at their fingertips. If they can't quickly find the information they need on your site, they can easily change to another site that takes less time to skim.
- Example:
 - <https://www.twitter.com/about>
 - <http://www.gummisig.com/about>

Step 4. Target audience

- What is the primary type of person that you want to visit your website? What are their characteristics? You have to make a decision to what type of "target audience" you would like to have (i.e. business professionals, family oriented readers, etc.) and create your content as if you were addressing a member of that audience.
- For example, vocabulary used on a solicitors website would ideally be very professional and well thought out. However, a website for a nightclub would be catchy and have more vibrant terminologies.
- Your vocabulary should represent the core values you want people to associate with you.
- However, you should ALWAYS use proper spelling, grammar and punctuation in all your business postings, even blogs. You never want to give a customer a reason to doubt your credibility. They trust you with the safety of their money and information, showing carelessness in your writing could make the reader form a different opinion about you. Running a spelling / grammar check on your copy BEFORE you post it prevents the questioning of your business's legitimacy before it is asked.
 - Hint: Try to write content in a word processing program. Newer versions of Microsoft Word and other similar programs check and correct issues automatically while you are typing.
- Example:
 - <http://www.barmusicall.com/>
 - <http://www.cubeclub-chemnitz.de/index.php>
 - <http://www.thompsoncoburn.com/>
 - <http://www.springhouselaw.com/>

Step 5. How much do I write?

- The more relevant, keyword/phrase full paragraphs you have, the better it is for search engines. However, you don't want to overwhelm the reader. You need to have relevant and interesting information for the website user to read easily.
- Some generic rules of thumb for the web are:
 - Most pages should include about 200 - 500 words. Of course not all pages would have that much relevant content, for example a "Contact Us" page. This gives search engines text to crawl through and ranks your site higher on search engines because of relevant keywords within the text.
 - Paragraphs should be 2-6 sentences in length. Dividing up your thoughts into shorter paragraphs can prevent a reader from feeling overwhelmed at first glance of your page.
 - Use headings for paragraph sections. Just like this PPT, every new thought in your writing should have an easy to read heading over it. This makes it easy for people to skim to the topic they're most interested in or to see if it's worth their time reading.
- These rules are great to follow for both ease of reading as well as search engine optimisation.
- Example:
 - <http://www.clydeco.com/expertise/sectors/aviation/>
 - <http://www.stuntbox.com/>
 - <http://www.mangrove.com/en/expertise>

Step 6. What do I write about?

What to write about can be specific to each industry and business type. Many ideas can come from looking at a few websites of businesses that are similar to yours. Some generic ideas are:

- **Explain what you do** - Not everyone visiting your website may be familiar with the industry you're in or what you do. (Example: If you identify yourself as a business consulting company, you should explain how you could help another business and cite examples.)
- **Special offers** - You may wish to have a special offers / sale page, or even just a section of a page. Also, advertising website-only-offers on location at your place of business can drive website traffic up.
- **Benefits of your industry (not just your specific business)** - Give the reader a reason why choosing a product or service of yours would be beneficial to them. For example, a spa/salon could write about all the health benefits of a stress-relieving day at the spa can have.
- **Your sales process** - What is your sales process? What kinds of things should customers know to find their ideal product or service? (Example - if your business sells carpeting, you might ask the customer to measure their living room.)
- **Why you are better than your competition** - Don't name names, but give the reader a reason to choose you - Are you a locally owned business? Do you have more experience? Are your products a better quality? Don't just state it, back up it up with the reason WHY.
- **Write about a topic you have expertise on** - Writing about a topic you already know well can be easy. Publishing an article or blog on your website that can be useful to others gives you credibility. It allows others to see you as a reputable business that has experience and knowledge.
- **News area** - Keep your customers up to date with information on your business. Did you just get in a shipment of a special item? Are you expanding?
- Some content can even come from your customers. You may want to include items like:
 - **Testimonials** - Having a few testimonials can give your business some credibility
 - **Product Reviews/Frequently Asked Questions** - Positive reviews of your products can increase sales

Example:

Testimonial page

- <http://www.freeagent.com/buzz>
- <http://www.freshbooks.com/index.php>
- <http://www.45royale.com/>

Blog/news page

- <http://blog.mailchimp.com/>
- <http://www.pedigreedogs.ie/blog/>
- <http://www.smallbusinesscan.com/>

What we do

- <http://www.madebyshape.co.uk/services/>
- <http://www.squarespace.com/>
- http://www.freshbooks.com/billing.php?header_tour=1

Step 7. Emphasise key elements

- Bolding a few main words or a phrase in a paragraph makes the article easier to read as well as making the main point or the paragraph more recognizable. This also helps with search engine optimisation. Be sure to keep this limited, to ensure your points stand out and don't overwhelm the reader.
- Break out elements
- Include links!
- Example:
 - <http://www.campaignmonitor.com/features/>
 - <http://www.hochburg.net/services.html>

Step 8. Add other media

- Just having text on a website isn't enough. Adding graphics, interesting typography and video are a great way to add interest to your site and make the site look user-friendly.
- Imagery/typography
 - <http://www.deweypizza.com/>
 - <http://www.aveillant.com/>
 - <http://www.mangrove.com/en/work>
- Examples video in use:
 - <http://maps.google.com/help/maps/businessphotos/learn-more.html>
 - <http://www.madprideireland.ie/>
 - <http://mailchimp.com/>
- **Professional Graphics**

To keep up with larger competitors in your industry, it's vital to have professional looking images and graphics on your website. There are many stock image websites that have millions of photographs and graphics in their database that are available to purchase. You may even be able to download generic images of your specific products or service. This can prove very cost effective compared to hiring your own graphic designer or photographer.
- Paid Sites:
<http://www.istockphoto.com/>
- Examples stock in use:
 - <http://www.olivebear.com/>
 - <http://www.practiceevolve.com.au/>
 - <http://www.studenty.me/>
 - <http://www.epubdirect.com/>

Step 9. Keep content fresh

- Once you complete the basis of your website, remember to regularly update it. Adding new content to your site regularly is vital. This doesn't mean you should re-write the copy that you had created previously, but you do need to ADD to it. Writing an occasional blog about your industry, or a news update on your business will be fine. Keeping your website "fresh" important for several reasons.
 - **Search Engines** - When search engines see updates on your site they will index the new content and record the date. Search engines seek fresh new content, and can rank a newer article higher than a similar article that is older.
 - **Customer Loyalty** - Customers will be more adept to return to your website to see what is new if it is updated frequently.
 - **Professional Image** - Having a website that has fresh new information proves that you care about your business and your image. Potential customers might also be turned away when only seeing news articles and blogs that are dated from the previous year.
- Example:
 - <http://www.pedigreedogs.ie/blog/>

Step 10. Don't feel overwhelmed!

- Unless you're a highly creative professional author, creating all the content for your website in a couple days isn't a feasible goal. You can start out slowly by just doing some research on other company's websites and deciding what you do and don't like. Think about what ideas and main points you'd like to write about and jot them down in a notebook. Make it a point to spend some time everyday (even if it's just a few minutes) to get your thoughts and ideas organized, and soon you'll have a complete and useful website.
- Example:
 - <http://www.serene-naturist.com/>
 - http://www.pandminc.com/pmweb/pm_intro.html
 - <http://georgerrmartin.com/>
 - <http://www.amazingthings.org/>