How to Write for the Web: A Tip Sheet

Writing for the web is different than for other media in several ways, and these differences are driven by how people use the Internet. Recognizing that content consumers are saturated with information these days, communicators must deliver quality information *and* make it well presented. If that is not enough, standing out online requires that you write in a way both that appeals to your primary audience, and to the digital content king-makers – search engines and social networks. Before you can engage with those you wish to reach, you must:

1) Promote the visibility of your content; and
2) Encourage online searchers to click-through and utilize it.

Achieving these fundamental outreach goals requires that you consider how Google and Facebook tools prioritize content and present it in response to user needs. By taking into consideration their approach to selecting content, even as you create it, you have a better chance of having your message heard.

Tips on Promoting Visibility of Your Website Content

As dominant provider in the field of online search, Google has literally made a science of matching searchers and their needs with content that addresses them. Its tools for ranking websites operate on the principle that quality content is:

1) Clear and immediately compelling; and
2) Credible

How to make your website content clear and immediately compelling?

Clear and immediately compelling content is terse and easily understandable. Little effort is required to glean its takeaways. Individuals with little time can get the point and move ahead. To improve the potential for your content to be noticed, write with this fundamental reality in mind.

Ultimately, approaches for making web content more highly visible in the digital age are rooted in the ages-old rules of good writing. In concept, the best practices for web writing will sound a bit like the advice you got from your high school English teacher. Here are eight rules to guide your effort:

1) Have a short, clear and compelling title.
2) Include carefully worded headings and subheadings for structure.
3) Write clear and simple topic sentences.
4) Use terms that your key audience will understand.
5) Emphasize key topic words in the bodies of text.
6) Properly label charts and images – clearly and concisely.
7) Overall, Be Brief.
8) The web address of your content should be short and include key topic words.

Getting noticed online starts with good writing, but there are a few additional considerations. Chief among them are the terms you choose to use in your writing. To be visible, your content must be responsive to the searches done by your target audience. Ask yourself how your content relates to their needs and interests. To find out, you will need to do some keyword research. A search engine

optimization specialist, who is a professional in promoting content online, can help you identify promising terms.

As most webpages are rendered using a Hypertext Markup Language (HTML), there are some technical aspects to formatting your well-written content for online use. You text, titles, subheadings, and even photos will need to be marked-up appropriately, or Google's tools may not recognize them. This is an area where you may need a little help.

How to demonstrate credibility of your website content?

Demonstrating credibility, the second key factor that Google considers when assessing content quality, goes well beyond the basics of good writing. However, elements of your content may affect how it is rated. For example, including links to credible external resources or relevant online tools provides a signal that your content is well thought through and potentially useful. Good grammar also sends a signal that your content was thoughtfully crafted, and therefore worthwhile.

To help Google and other tools recognize the value of your content, and present it in the best possible light, consider including *metadata* with your work. Metadata, additional information that classifies or describes your content, may be used to help others – including providers like Google – quickly understand what your content is about and how it may be useful. For example, a focus on T*opic keywords,* terms that classify or characterize your work, may help clarify what your content is about and can aid in categorizing it.

Tips on Encouraging Online Searchers to Click

Your content's visibility among search results is, no doubt, an achievement, but you still need to encourage online searchers to click, view and interact with it. To earn clicks, your content must make the case to target audience members that it is relevant and worth their time. This means you must both consider your *journalistic slant*, and make sure the value of your content is immediately apparent.

Optimizing your content's teaser, the text that shows up as description on a search results page, helps communicate its value to prospective viewers. Search engines tend to glean teaser text either from the body of text or from a stand-alone description you provide.

The first sentence of a blog post, article or factsheet often provides search engines with teaser text. When writing, use your topic sentence to capsulize your work's main point and possibly its value-add to target audience members.

Teaser text may also be drawn from a writing piece's metadata. A web developer or search engine optimization professional can format a description you create, along with other elements of your content in a way that search engines and other providers can make best use of it.

An Example of well-crafted content

What might a paragraph of well-crafted content look like? The example below illustrates how the opening paragraph of a fact sheet on burn treatment might look. It emphasizes the phrase Burn Treatment, a very commonly searched term.

Burn Treatment

Treatment of severe burns requires attention to several key symptoms. A major consideration with most burn injuries is the risk of infection. Large full thickness burns are often treated using skin grafts to address this concern. Treatment for most major burns may include use of antibiotics as well. Burn treatment should also include moisturizing, as most patients experience skin dryness and itchiness. Because damaged skin is susceptible to tears, blisters and ulcerations, treatment of a burn injury must consider these possibilities.

Key features of this paragraph include a terse title featuring the targeted keyword, *burn treatment*, use of the same term as frequently as practical within the text body, and emphasis of the keyword in the topic sentence – though in a varied form. Finally, the selection of the keyword itself is based upon a review of commonly searched and relevant terms.

The time and attention you give to crafting your content affects how its quality will be perceived both by search engines and the individuals you hope will read it.   Behind the technology tools used by Google and others to rate, rank and present your content is the premise that good writing from credible sources sells. By speaking directly to audience needs, and getting back to basics, you can help gain greater visibility and acceptance for your contributions to the field.