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*Helping growing businesses make smart e-business decisions*

## **How to write good website content**

**Any of you who have read our articles and newsletters will know that we constantly emphasise that content is king when it comes to search engine ranking and visitor conversion on your websites.**

**Gareth Edwards of the B2B Centre provides an overview of some of the key techniques to creating good website content.**

### **What is website content?**

When we talk about website content we are primarily referring to the page text. The writing that describes your organisation, tells readers what you make or sell and provides information about your customer wins, awards and financial successes.

It is important to get the page text right because it is one of the key elements to making websites and eMarketing work. But because we are using the web there is more to it than just writing copy.

For a start your information is being displayed on a computer screen which, despite massive improvements recently, is not ideal for reading from. Then there is the matter of hyperlinking to help site visitors to navigate around your site or guide them to external sources of information. Finally your content has a new and very different readership to your flesh and blood audience. Search engines are now very sophisticated and they, to all intents and purposes, really read what you write. They also look at other parts of your website to find out more about you.

Yes there is more to it than meets the eye. Let's look at some ways to be top of your game.

### **Planning**

The key to success in writing good content is planning. For the purposes of this article I am going to assume that most of you are interested in promoting your business and selling your products and services rather than just writing general articles or pieces of copy.

The main areas to consider are as follows;

- What do you do and how is it of interest to visitors?  
Do you have a truly unique product or service, do you have exclusive rights to sell a product, do you provide a better service (e.g. Faster delivery than the "big boys"), are you the only supplier in your locality (be it Leamington Spa, Warwickshire or the West Midlands) and can you promise a return on investment, reduced costs or a time saving?

*Thinking through this will allow you to develop a stronger proposition to offer site visitors. It also helps the keyword generation process.*

- What do you want them to do when they get there (buy something directly using eCommerce, contact you by phone or eMail, download information etc.)?

*In our experience an amazing number of websites do not tell visitors what their options are or what to do next.*



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- Who are the visitors to your site – age, sex, nationality, industry, job type, consumers, business people, customers, shareholders etc.?

*Knowing more about visitors should guide the style of your writing. It also enables you to create entry points (especially on the home page) in text or graphical form that will attract the attention of different visitor groups and allow you to guide them to specific web pages designed for them.*

- Why are they visiting the site (you might want to sell visitors something immediately but what do visitors want from the interaction – reassurance, finance terms, customer service details, prices etc.)?

*It is well worth asking visitors, clients and contacts what they want from your site. This research will also give you some clues as to how people search for you, your products and services*

- How are they getting to the site (natural searches, referrals from other sites such as directories or through pay per click (Pay Per Click) ads)?

*This is important because you may need to write specific content to match what visitors saw when they were looking for you. For instance if a visitor clicked on a PPC ad offering a discount then the page that they are directed to needs to refer to the offer too.*

Check out the website planning toolkit on the B2B website as a great aid in this process (<http://www.nb2bc.co.uk/downloadfile/?id=22>).

## Implementation

### Content – reader's perspective

#### Readability

Here are some simple pointers to making it easier for site visitors to read any text that you have provided.

- Use a 12pt font or higher – smaller fonts will be difficult to read on screen. If in doubt black text on a white background can always be read.
- Standard fonts such as Times New Roman, Arial and Verdana are usually easier to read and are more likely to be available on visitors' computers.
- Split up text with sub-headings and bullet points. Somebody scanning the page should be able to get a good idea of the key messages without reading every word
- Take out jargon, clichés and acronyms unless you are absolutely certain that all of the site or page visitors will understand them.
- Don't waffle and use simple sentences wherever possible.
- Don't be afraid to make readers scroll down the page but make sure that the most important messages and your call to action is visible "above the fold".



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Take a look at Jakob Nielsen's useit website (<http://www.useit.com>) for some interesting research and tips on how to make website easier to use.

## Function

The planning process will have provided you with information to ensure that the content you are providing fulfils the necessary function for both you and your site visitors.

**Purpose** - Content for each page needs to match the planned purpose of the page. The role of an "about us" page, for instance, is to provide information about the organisation's structure, workforce, skills, experience etc. that is relevant to its ability to deliver products and services. Additional information about the company can be provided but perhaps at the bottom of the page or via a hyperlink to separate "history" section.

**Entry Points** - If your site has a number of different visitor or user types then your content can be used to attract the attention of different groups, to provide them with a focused message and possibly direct them (via a hyperlink) to a different part of the website. These "entry points" can be provided in text form (by simply saying something like "corporate users are provided with their own account manager – more information can be found in the corporate user section") or with linked graphics.



**Navigation** - Good content also supports user navigation around the site. This can be as simple as using reader oriented titles for menu bars and buttons. On a long requiring scrolling you could provide links at the top of the page to the subheadings used in the rest of the text.

## Call to Action

Good website content should support and then state the desired action for the webpage.

For many of you the primary call to action is to generate an enquiry by phone or email with a secondary call to action to, perhaps, download an article or sign up for a newsletter. In these circumstances where your offer is not strongly defined it is worth highlighting the benefit to the prospect of making the effort to get in contact or fill in a form. You could restate the number of clients you have already helped solve a problem, offer a free one hour consultation or promise that product related information will arrive within the hour! Make them realize that they would be missing out by not signing up.

Whatever you do please remember to explain exactly what visitors need to do to take action (e.g. send an email or fill in a form). Also note that calls to action should be visible on all pages and not just the home page.

## Retain Visitor Interest

Lots and lots of websites are plain boring. What can you do to stop people dropping off?



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- Put yourself in their shoes. All of the information that you provide needs to relate to the interests, requirements and problems of your different user groups. Talk about benefits rather than features.
- Use pictures, video, animation and graphics to illustrate the theme or topic of the page and of individual sections and paragraphs. But be sparing. Irrelevant and overbearing pictures and clips will draw attention away from important messages.
- Use hypertext links to give readers the opportunity to get more detail on a particular subject.
- Follow the formatting guidelines outlined above to prevent the rapid onset of eyesore.
- Be different and be interesting. Small businesses, and particularly sole traders, can get away with expressing their personality and being wacky or outrageous (check out <http://www.gillianwesley.co.uk>).

If you are feeling less adventurous then utilize devices such as surveys or interviews to introduce a more customer-centric element to your content. Alternatively talk about staff activities such as charity events that highlight your businesses philanthropy and show off what a good team you have.

## Content – search engine perspective

We have touched on the need to make content attractive to search engines to support keyword ranking and indexing. Fortunately one of the best ways of doing this is to.....write readable, meaningful text. The search engines read the text and make sense of it. They pick out keywords and phrases from what you have written and evaluate how “helpful” what you say is to prospective searchers. They are very, very sophisticated.

Let's have a look at some other ways you can create content that is search engine focused.

### Keywords and phrases

We would need a separate article to do this subject justice. The good news is that if you have planned your content to describe your offers effectively and reflect the needs of your audience then the chances are that you have unwittingly defined some relevant keywords and phrases.

The important point to consider is how to define a phrase that balances three criteria;

- a. Relevant to you and what you do
- b. Has the potential to be used by a prospective customer
- c. Has the lowest level of competition

Your chosen words and phrases should then appear at the beginning of paragraphs near the top of the page as well as being liberally sprinkled (up to say 4-5 times) through the rest of the page text.

Google has a free keyword research tool at <https://adwords.google.com/select/KeywordToolExternal?defaultView=3>

### Page titles

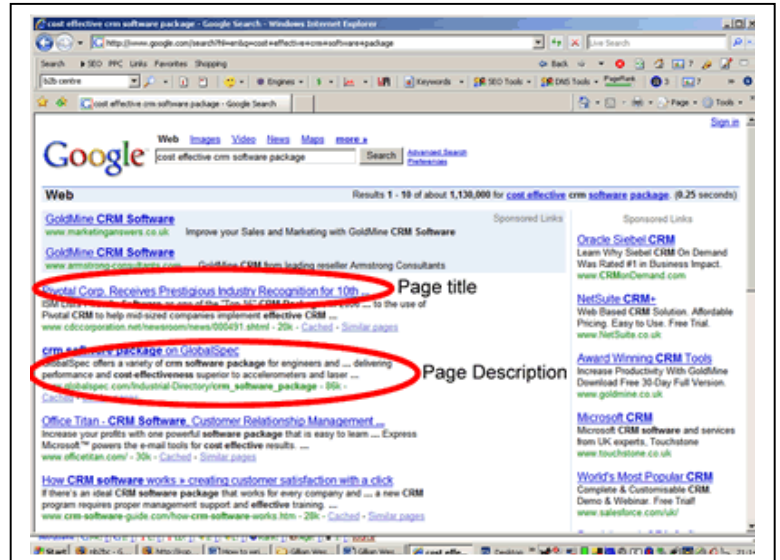
The page title tag of a Web page appears in the top left of the web browser and is a useful navigational aid. The title tag provides the search engine with a snapshot about the page and provides additional weighting for keywords and phrases. It is also used by search engines to populate the search engine results page so it should contain a compelling call to action.

Individual page titles should be created for each page on the site. Each one should contain a maximum of 10 words.

### Page descriptions

The text found in the Page Description tag is believed (there is some debate on this) to be used by search engines to determine the theme or context of the page.

The text (maximum 30 words) will be displayed to the user in the search results for some engines so again it should be meaningful, relevant and snappy.



### Alt Image Tags

The ALT image tag of an image is used to describe the graphic for those users who surf the web with the graphics turned off. It is also useful for those who are sight impaired and have software that reads the contents of Web pages to them. As search engines cannot read images, many will look at the contents of ALT image tags and use the text as part of the whole indexing process. The ALT image tag should be defined for each for each image: describe the image first while also including a keyword or phrase.

### H1 Headings

Your headings and sub-headings can be tagged as html headings 1 through 5. This gives them a bit more weighting with the search engines especially when the heading contains a key word or phrase. In html editors such as NVU ([www.nvu.com](http://www.nvu.com)) and content management systems like Joomla ([www.joomla.com](http://www.joomla.com)), which are both free open source products, this should be a pretty straightforward operation. Otherwise ask your developer.

### Links and anchor text

Using meaningful text and keywords (e.g. "download a free trial of our aerospace focused erp system") in links, rather than just "click here", is a useful way of increase the weighting of the text by the search engines.



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