

Writing for SEO: Best Practices

Writing for the Web

- **Know your reader:** Identifying and understanding your target audience is critical. Take all things into consideration. If writing to a general audience, avoid highly technical terms and jargon.
 - **Keep copy clean and concise:** Get your message across with as few words as possible. Web users do not typically read word for word, they skim, so cater to them by creating copy that's scan-able and easy to read.
 - **Incorporate links into actual copy:** One way to keep copy tight is to avoid using meaningless "click here" link phrases. Sentences flow better when links are incorporated into the text.
 - **Use bullets when possible:** People like lists, and are more likely to read copy that's bulleted because it's more inviting than a lengthy paragraph. Bullets allow you to quickly get your point across.
 - **Avoid fluff, stick to information:** People come to the web seeking information and want to obtain as quickly as possible. The web is not the place to clutter your information with clever and needless phrases.
 - **Write for how people search:** Use keywords and phrases your target audience is using and searching for to organically improve the site's SEO.
 - **Prioritize content by placing key info at top of pages:** Start with the main point, and then expand upon it. The key information or message should not be buried at the end since your reader may lose interest and never receive the information.
 - **Speak to the user:** "You" is the most powerful word on the web, so always write in first or second person. Write engaging copy for your reader as it translates to interaction.
 - **Use action words:** Make your content active. Every sentence should be action-oriented, moving readers towards something - whether it's entering a sweepstakes, taking a survey, etc.
 - **Use visuals:** Use charts and graphs or other imagery to help tell your story or convey your key messages.
 - **Recheck facts and proofread:** Making sure your facts are accurate is critical for maintaining credibility. Take the extra time to double-check all facts and proofread several times, considering spell check doesn't typically pick up every error (for example: their vs. there).
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Writing for Social Media (Facebook, Twitter, Blogs)

10 Must Have's for your Social Media Policy

<http://mashable.com/2009/06/02/social-media-policy-musts/>

- Introduce purpose
- Be responsible and authentic
- Consider your audience
- Use your concept of community
- Respect copyright and fair use
- Protect confidential information

A Headline Title Trick to Maximize Social and SEO Traffic – The One Two Punch

<http://www.winningtheweb.com/title-trick-social-media-seo.php>

Facebook:

Tips for Writing Facebook Updates

<http://www.nonprofitmarketingguide.com/blog/2010/06/02/tips-for-writing-facebook-and-twitter-updates/>

- Keep it to no more than 4 lines, and 1-2 is better (character limit is 420)
- Phrase it so it is “Like” – able.
- Include links, photos or videos that fans might want to share

Twitter:

Tips for Writing Twitter Updates

<http://www.nonprofitmarketingguide.com/blog/2010/06/02/tips-for-writing-facebook-and-twitter-updates/>

- Limit to 140 characters
- Leave room for others to retweet and perhaps use a #hashtag (if you use the full 140 characters, they have to edit in order to retweet you)
- Use shortened URLs (e.g. bit.ly)
- Retweet (RT) – it says a lot about you, both from the content you share and the fact that you are doing it

10 Essential Twitter Writing Tips

<http://www.wordsellinc.com/blog/social-media/10-essential-twitter-writing-tips/>

- If you seek retweets, keep your Tweet around 100 characters

- Write your blog post titles with Twitter in mind
- For search purposes, use keywords in your tweets
- For search purposes, put keywords at the beginning of your tweets
- Because of the URL effect, some suggest moving the “RT@abcdef” text to the end of a retweet
- Don’t over abbreviate
- For link tweets, effective summarization on Twitter means giving people a reason to retweet
- My basic summarization formula for link tweets is reason to read + keyword rich topic. Start with the reason to capture attention.
- For other types of tweets, summarization technique is hard to reduce to a formula.
- When replying, make it easy for the receiver to identify the conversation stream

‘There’s an art to writing on Facebook or Twitter’

http://www.usatoday.com/life/lifestyle/2009-06-09-status-writing-online_N.htm (Maria Puente - USA Today)

- “Funny, clever and sassy updates and tweets stand out because they are the exception. Boring, vapid or just TMI — too much information — updates often dominate in cyberspace.”

Copywriting for Twitter and the web

- <http://econsultancy.com/blog/3526-10-ways-to-make-every-tweet-count-copywriting-for-twitter>
- <http://econsultancy.com/blog/3069-good-copy-bad-copy>

The Act of Writing Great Twitter Headlines

<http://www.copyblogger.com/twitter-headlines/>

- Headlines Must...
 - Be useful to the reader
 - Provide some sense of urgency
 - Convey the idea that the main benefit is unique
- Some people will tell you that a good Twitter headline is *as short as possible*. This is due not only to the 140-character limit that Twitter imposes, but also because in order for your headline to spread, people need room to retweet it

How to write in 140 characters or less

<http://www.lifehack.org/articles/communication/how-to-write-in-140-characters-or-less.html>

- Short writing still needs to be good writing.
 - Every character counts, so use strong verbs and a minimum of adverbs - you just can’t afford to say in two words what you can say in one.

- Avoid "university words". Almost every long word in English has a short, blunt word that means the same thing.
- Forget about breaking your thoughts into two posts. You have no control over how your post will get read or whether they will stay together.
- Write first, then rewrite. Spill it all out and then trim.
- You can usually cut "that" and "which".
- Eliminate personal pronouns. "I am going to the [Apple store](#)" can be "Going to the Apple Store".
- Write short sentences. They stand out more. You share a page with dozens of posts. Many short sentences look like something worth reading.
- Use punctuation! Many will tell you to rely on forceful words, not exclamation marks, but when words are limited, punctuation adds impact.
- Be personal. Short posts are very conversational and almost intimate. That's something business doesn't do well, but on Twitter, it counts.
- Get to the point. Say what you want me to do and why I should do it. You have no room to build anticipation – cut straight to the chase.

Blogs:

Tips on writing for a blog

- Use search terms in blog titles
- Tag your blog posts
- Link to previous posts within the copy
- Optimize copy to emphasize key search terms

Blogging Is About Writing

<http://www.probblogger.net/archives/2007/04/02/bloggng-is-about-writing/>

- **Don't Just Show, Show and Tell:** It's time to get back to show and tell. Blogs offer amazing ways to present multimedia information, but you still have to tell us about it. You must *show and tell* in order for your point to be fully understood. Words may not do it alone, but a picture is not worth a thousand words when fed through feeds and search engines. You must have the words.
- **Make Your Point in the First 200 Words:** You have less than a second to capture your reader's attention. If the user on your site, feed, or search engine summary doesn't "get the point" in the first two or three sentences, you've lost them.
- **Use Command Verbs to Teach:** If you have something to share, a lesson to teach, advice, or guidance, use command verbs to energize your "how to" words. Words, like "make", "do", "write", "take", and "build" are active instruction verbs. When people are searching, they like to be told "what to do". Tell them.

- **Write Clickable Titles:** The keywords you use in your post titles tell potential visitors what your post is about. If they don't get it, they won't click it. If they do click, and the content doesn't match, they won't be back.

Nine Signs of an Effective Blog Post:

- Criteria a blog post must satisfy if it is to be a successful post:
 - The headline draws the reader in
 - A concrete detail or visual illustrates the benefit promised in the headline
 - The lead expands the theme of the heading
 - The layout is clear and scannable
 - The post covers the topic in a logical sequence
 - The post is persuasive
 - The post is interesting to read
 - The post is believable
 - An about page – who are you?
 - Your background and experience in your topic
 - Endorsements, testimonials from clients, etc.
 - Professionalism, attention to detail, etc.
 - The post asks for some action

Writing for Search Engines

Emphasize content containing target keywords and phrases

Heather Lloyd Martin

<http://www.seroundtable.com/archives/013060.html>

- You should have 2-3 key phrases throughout your copy
- The first paragraph is important for marketing to draw your users into the content
- Structuring the page: Use headlines, short paragraphs, subheads and call to action (hyperlinks) - especially important in internal linking structure
- SEO copywriting makes your writing more specific -- it does not destroy it

Use old words when writing for findability

<http://www.useit.com/alertbox/search-keywords.html>

- Supplement 'made up words' with well-known words

- Play down jargon and internal vocabulary
- Supplement brand names with generic terms
- Avoid “politically correct terminology”

How to Write for Search Engines

<http://www.netconcepts.com/how-to-write-for-search-engines/>

- **Think like the search engine:** The engines look at the HTML code on the page and parse the textual copy on the page, eliminating HTML filler code used for layout. The textual copy goes into the search engine’s “index” - a very large database. When a search engine user conducts a search on the search engine, the search engine identifies all of the pages in this vast database that include those words on the page and/or those words in the link text pointing to that page. So, a page that does not include the words that the user has searched for is unlikely to rank.
- **Pin down the key words you are going for on this page:** Make sure your most important keywords are placed near the front of your title tag and in the first paragraph or two of body copy. And further emphasizing your keyword through an H1 heading tag won’t hurt either!
 - Think through how you can best incorporate your targeted keywords towards the front of your title tag, H1 tag, and body copy, and yet simultaneously write something interesting, compelling, information-rich and value added.
 - Then start writing. Write at least 250 words of copy. Pay attention to the link text that you use within the copy, avoiding such phrases as ‘click here’ or ‘more information’ as link text and instead using good keywords that are relevant to the page that you are linking to.
- **Test the waters:** run the draft page through a spider simulator such as the one at searchengineworld.com; link this page in to the rest of your site and see how it performs, and where it ranks in the search results for the targeted keyword

SEO Copywriting

<http://www.webworkshop.net/seo-copywriting.html>

- SEO Copywriting is good when...
 - there are not many search terms to target
 - the search terms are on the low to middle end of competitiveness

http://www.searchengine-weblog.com/50226711/10_tips_for_seo_copywriting.php

- SEO Copywriting combines 3 elements:
 - Valuable content
 - Readability
 - Structure and formatting

Writing for email

15 Tips for Writing Effective Email

<http://thinksimplenow.com/productivity/15-tips-for-writing-effective-email/>

- No rambling or long intros
- Get to the point quickly
- Next action clearly stated
- Present benefits
- Fonts and formatting matter
- Review for conciseness, simplicity and clarity
- One question per email
- Be yourself - that is, the concise version of yourself

Best Practices in Writing Email Subject Lines

http://www.mailchimp.com/articles/best_practices_in_writing_email_subject_lines/

- The best email subject lines are short, descriptive, and provide the reader with a reason to explore your message further.
- Attempts to stand out in the inbox by using splashy or cheesy phrases will invariably result in your email being ignored.
- 3 Words to Avoid = Help, Percent off, and Reminder
- Subject Line: The general rule of thumb in email marketing is to keep your subject line to 50 characters or less
- From Line: The 'From' information can be as important as the subject line. As a best practice the From and Subject line should work in tandem. The From line should communicate who you are as the sender. As much as possible this entry should not change and should concisely convey who you are. Save any humorous phrases or concepts for the subject line.
- Promotional Emails: Keep the message straightforward and avoid using splashy promotional phrases, CAPS, or exclamation marks in your subject lines. Subject lines framed as questions can often perform better.

Top 5 Best Practices for Writing Effective Email

<http://blogs.bnet.com/businesstips/?p=5577>

- **Top 5 Do's**
 1. Put important information in bold, so it's easier to see. If you've addressed an e-mail to several people and there's an action for a certain person, bold his or her name when you address the issue. Use bold sparingly.

2. If action is required, say so at the start of the e-mail. Don't tell a long story with the requested action at the bottom.
 3. Keep your signature short and professional. Lose the pithy quote and just include your title and phone number.
 4. Keep the subject line relevant. If the topic changes over the course of a long thread, update the subject so it's relevant.
 5. Proof your e-mail before you send it.
- **Top 5 Don'ts**
 1. Don't ever type anything in ALL CAPS, even to get someone's attention
 2. Don't include your entire team or your boss on every e-mail you send
 3. Don't send large attachments unless absolutely necessary, especially to a mailing list or distribution list. If possible, upload your files to the cloud, such as DropBox or MemoPal and provide a link.
 4. Don't send e-mail when you're emotional
 5. Don't try to be funny, especially to a mixed audience

Writing Email Newsletters: Best Practices

<http://groundwire.org/support/articles/writing-newsletters-best-practices>

- Keep it short! And link to your website whenever possible.
- Use a minimum of graphical elements. Focus on useful and informative content, not whether or not you have rounded corners on your table cells. E-mail is just not the place for creative graphic design
- Be consistent. Decide on a standard number of articles and a standard format for writing articles and stick to it! Always use the same colors and placement of elements within your newsletter
- Optimize for the preview pane. A large percentage of people only read email in their preview pane. This means that the top 200-300 pixels of your message is what people are going to see first. If all you have there is a large banner image, you won't get as many reads as you might if you include the titles of your articles in that space.
- Use a table of contents.
- Make your content scannable. Ideally you should have between 3 and 5 articles in each newsletter.
- Use links properly. Avoid "click here" links. Instead use actionable language such as "read more . . .", "donate", or "unsubscribe".
- Test, test, test! Send tests to a variety of email clients such as Outlook, Yahoo, Gmail, and Hotmail.