



Wording Up YOUR WEBSITE

Are you losing business because of your website? More and more customers are logging on to the Web to decide where to spend their money because its biggest drawcards are its speed and convenience, as customers jump from site to site instead of walking from store to store.

Web savvy customers don't need to be patient. Studies have shown that potential customers simply move on if they can't find the information they want quickly and easily.

Appealing design and speedy functionality are important but they

Back to basics. Forget funky design, good writing is the key to a clear and intuitive website.

By Glenn Murray*

don't ensure your site is well structured (intuitive) or well written (clear). If clear and intuitive is what you want, then you need to follow the two golden rules listed below:

- Write first, build later.
- Write to your customer.

WRITE FIRST

The real message on most websites is in the writing, so it makes sense that the writing should determine the structure. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. Most businesses choose the structure and design of their site

Click Convenience

Macromedia has designed software to make web publishing more accessible to many. The software, Contribute, allows content to be regularly updated on a website by non-technical people without affecting its format and style. All the user requires is basic word processing skills.

The content can be changed both on and offline and the user can update instantly by the click of a button.

Released late last year, the software has been designed to unburden web professionals and empower business users by 'click-button convenience'.

Contribute works with any HTML website, including those coded by hand or created using tools such as Dreamweaver MX or FrontPage.

Macromedia Contribute is available for \$249. For a preview visit www.macromedia.com/go/contribute/

first and then try and fit the writing around that structure. This flies in the face of commonsense. When you speak to someone, you structure your speech around your message, you don't decide on a structure then change the message to suit. So you need to plan what you want to say before you create the site. Maybe even write the whole thing first and then use the message to determine the structure.

When deciding what to write, think about what your customer wants to know rather than what you want to say. It's a subtle difference, but it is the key to engaging a potential customer.

Most customers will want to know the basics:

- What do you do?
- What benefit can you offer them?
- Why should they choose your service or product?
- How much does it cost?
- How can they contact you?
- Where are you located?

BREVITY & CLARITY

Your website has to communicate a lot of information and to make matters worse, you are going to have limited space. Ideally, your customer won't

have to scroll on any page (all your information will fit in a single window) and that single view will need to contain more than just words. The design and navigation elements take up about a third of a window, and you should leave a bit of room for white space (you don't want to overwhelm the customer). As a rule of thumb you should expect to have about half the window free for text.

How you are going to fit all your information in such a confined space? This is where writing skills come in – choose your words very carefully.

Websites can be an extremely powerful piece of marketing collateral. You can reach millions of potential customers for as little as a few hundred dollars. Unfortunately, your competitors are all doing the same thing – it's a level playing field but there are a lot of players.

It is important that your message is structured and well thought out, otherwise your site will be a mess and no-one will bother to read about your business. If your message is clear, your site will be simple and easy to use. It's all in the words. **DSB**

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Making Your Site Secure

To set up a website that can handle e-commerce transactions, you need to look at the all-important issue of security.

First, you must decide if you want the responsibility of hosting your own site or whether you want to use the services of one of the many web hosting facilities available.

"If you want to be the most secure, you are better off going with a web host that has been in the business for a number of years and understands security," says Dion Gullotta of Far Edge Technology.

Either way, Gullotta advises that you make sure your information is hosted on an Apache server as it is slightly more secure than others.

To run an e-commerce site, you will also need to get a digital security certificate – most web hosting businesses will have

them already. When this is in place customers visiting your site will see a padlock or a key down the bottom right hand side of the screen to indicate the site is secure.

"Usually the host company partners with a third-party [such as a bank] to offer transactions," says Gullotta. This is a merchant account and will enable the website to accept credit cards via

a secure forum, for a fee. If accepting credit card information it is also important to use 128-bit secure sockets layer (SSL) security.

Finally, if you are storing your customer's financial information on a computer at the office, make sure that information is kept secure, preferably on a dedicated computer which only connects to the internet to retrieve that data.

If accepting credit card information it is important to use 128-bit SSL security.