

Writing a blog

Who's going to read it and why?

The most important thing to remember is to write for your audience – write for your readers. You should share news they are interested in or provide practical knowledge or entertain.

All major formats such as magazines, newspapers and websites serve a specific audience so likewise, you must aim to give your readers exactly what they are searching for. You can only do this if you understand your audience and concentrate on their needs.

Copywriting basics

It's true, there are differences between writing for digital and traditional media, but there are also many similarities as you would expect.

No matter what the media, your copywriting must always seek to:

- Persuade people to open the communication
- Encourage people to read it
- Convince people to believe it
- Entice people to act on it

Stand out

Copywriting in the digital era is tough. The internet has increased poor content exponentially. Whatever digital communication you write (web pages, banners, blogs, email, etc.) you need to rise above the 'crap'.

Context

The world wide web is the **world wide** web. So avoid local dialect, idioms and slang. However, if your copy is stripped of all personality and turns-of-phrase, it becomes generic and bland. Keep some personality to appeal to your target audience. It's about balance.

A simple and effective structure to approach your copywriting is **AIDCA**. It ensures you hook your reader and leave nothing out.

Attention

Interest

Desire

Conviction

Action

Are headlines as important online?

You bet!

- They sum up the main benefit of your product or service
- They provide the incentive to read on
- They summarise the content
- They stop your reader leaving your page
- They serve as a taster in search results

Write for the platform

The web is an informal space; it's a personal place as well as being used by businesses which means you shouldn't write a blog in the same way as you would write a product brochure.

So how can you find the right tone?

Record your voice.

Imagine you have your reader in front of you. Use the natural everyday language you'd use if you were trying to talk to them. Avoid using 'Sunday best' language just for effect. Instead, keep it friendly, warm and conversational. Don't overdo it though, you're also not talking to your friends at a music festival.

Unlike academic writing try and use short words not long ones

Use short words rather than longer synonyms when writing for online media. People are busy and don't have time to decode long words. Using short words also improves the readability of your copy and makes it easy to understand.

Unlike academic writing use short sentences not long ones

Research shows that once a sentence goes over 21 words, its readability decreases sharply. That's for print; and for committed, literate readers. Online, web pages that routinely use even 16-word sentences can struggle.

Paragraphs

Another area where writing for online is different to writing for print is paragraphing. The difficulties of reading online mean overlong paragraphs get skipped altogether. Online use 4 to 5 lines as a general rule.

It's not about length, it's about focus

Research shows longer copy out-performs short as long as you keep it relevant. Focus unremittingly on your reader's interests, concerns, hopes, fears and motivations and they'll repay you with their attention.

Many news websites actually tell you how long their articles will take to read.

It is **imperative** that any online **copy** you write is **scannable**.

Scanning

All online copy needs to be scannable. It should provide your reader with a clearly marked path they can follow. It should help them pick up on both the overall point of the page, and the important points within it. Online readers scan the page first looking for clues as to its relevance, if they find them they are more likely to read on.

Hypertext

Links in the body copy provide a less formal navigation system for web pages and allow the reader an alternative route to the navigation bar.

Links work on both scanning and skim-reading strategies.

Most importantly they allow your reader to navigate a route that relates to their own personal interests. You still write in the way you would for print, but you structure it using hypertext so the story unfolds on multiple levels.

Content - *some like it hot*

Strong, confident opinions well expressed get attention. The blog is a great opportunity to take a stand on current issues and challenging established opinions when the writer has a different point of view.

Use video and images

Without visual stimuli reading blogs that are purely text can be off putting. Facebook predicts that the platform will be all video in less than 5 years. Audiences like watching and viewing as much, if not more than reading.

Content - *when it's FriYAY!*

Try to end the week with a blog post that's light-hearted to bring a smile to people's faces over the weekend. It shows you're human.

Be original

Try to always create content that it is impossible for competitors to steal or replicate.

Own the space.

Content variety and frequency

To achieve success, it is critical to post fresh content at a frequency that encourages your audience to rely on you as a regular source of knowledge. It will keep them coming back for more.

Subscription options

However the most common reason for unsubscribes to any blog is “too many updates.” To counteract this issue give subscribers the option of daily, weekly or monthly updates.

Search engine optimisation

This is a huge subject area in itself and is worthy of comprehensive research if it is something that interests you. Every year there are major changes to the “rules” of SEO so the algorithms behind search engines are constantly changing. The optimising of blog content for search engine performance requires continual re-evaluation and a high level of expertise. Google and LinkedIn provide excellent online courses on the subject.

<https://learndigital.withgoogle.com/digitalgarage/course/become-searchable-online/lesson/46>

Keywords

To improve search engine optimisation break your search engine keywords into two groups:

1. Keywords your audience are interested in.
2. Keywords your brand/business/service/product/cause has the capability to own or rank highly for.

Then develop useful and entertaining content around these keywords.

Amplify with social

Use LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and virtually every other form of social media to promote your blog posts. If your audience don't know about it, they're not going to read it.

To sum up

- Understand your audience
- Don't just write great content, write content your audience wants
- Understand and implement an SEO strategy
- Market your blog to build traffic with a subscriber base
- Promote your blog posts via social media

Write on you crazy diamonds!