Web Sites For Advocacy and Community Organizing: Basics, Essentials, and Best Practices

Writing For the Web

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Learning Goals

► Understand how users “really” read content
► Appreciate importance of writing for specific “take-aways”
► Learn to make your points early and make text “scannable”
► Remember low-literacy readers as you write
► Consider your web site as story telling
  ▪ Use images as part of the story telling
Writing For the Web

How Users Read Websites: The Bad News

- Users Don’t Read, they scan
  - In testing, it was found 79% scanned page 16% read word by word

- Users read in an F shaped reading pattern
  - Horizontal across the top
  - Down the page and horizontal across again
  - Scan the left side bar

- Users do not scroll
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Users are Looking for:

- Concise
- Scannable
- Objective (rather than promotional)
- Credible
  - Links
  - Credentials
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► Ask yourself key questions before you start

▪ What is the one thing I want a user to remember after reading this page?

▪ Where do I want the user to go after reading this page?

▪ How am I going to get them there?
State your point early

- Express your main point in the first two paragraphs
- Unlike other writing, rhetoric is less important than information
- Keep critical information in first paragraph
- Don't make any important points “below the fold”
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► Make content “scannable”
  ▪ Use short informative titles that lead into details
  ▪ **Bold** key words and concepts
  ▪ Use headlines, sub-headings and bullets
    ▪ Use bulleted list to address main points
    ▪ Start with information and topic rich words that will jump out in this highlighted text when scanned (users may not read 3rd or 4th word)
  ▪ **Use white space to make more vertically scannable**
Writing For the Web

Make it easy to comprehend

- Write content using as few words as possible and avoid over flowery language
- Consider reading levels as you write
  - Home page: Target 6\textsuperscript{th} grade reading level
  - Other pages: Target 8\textsuperscript{th} grade reading level
- The less the user has to think and process the more they will retain
Writing For the Web

- Considerations for low-literacy readers
  - 48% of US population has low literacy (USDE)
  - Lower literacy readers don't scan
    - They read every word
    - Information needs to be less dense
  - Site search needs to be tolerant of misspellings
  - Complex navigation can be confusing
  - Avoid text that moves or changes
    - Including “fly-out” changes
Writing For the Web

► Use images and artwork to tell the story
  ▪ Images draw readers to links on lead-in pages and keep them interested on content pages
    ▪ Use images that vividly convey the content
  ▪ Summarize the story not the image in the caption
    ▪ Also use "ALT" text effectively
  ▪ Importance of icons
    ▪ Use iconography to summarize intent of content
Writing For the Web

- If the page has “an ask” make it easy to see
  - Use an icon to pull out

- Make content searchable
  - Have keywords in your title without endangering the integrity of your title

- Link Often
  - Links highlight key concepts and add credibility and excitement
Web Site as Story

► Stories have
  ▪ Conflict
  ▪ Sympathetic Characters
  ▪ Adversaries
  ▪ Tone
  ▪ Assumptions
Web Site as Story

Stories have “Points of Intervention”

- Point of production
- Point of destruction
- Point of consumption
- Point of decision
- Point of potential
- Point of assumption
Web Site as Story

Based on audience and tactics

- Story about organization
  - Character is victim
  - Bad guy
- Vs
- Story about the campaign
  - Character is person taking action
  - Bad guy is target
Web Site as Story

- Who is the sympathetic character in your narrative?
- How will people understand or relate your topic? Frames include...
  - First person narrative
  - Geography
  - Identity
    - Student, activist, press, academic
  - “Values”
Web Site as Story

“Challenge the narrative of powerlessness”

- Societal narrative posits individuals as powerless actors
- Change the terms of the story so that individuals are protagonists and change agents
- The goal is to shift a first-time visitor from thinking as a recipient of the narrative to being an empowered actor in the narrative

Thank you, SmartMeme.com
End Of Section

Questions?
Comments?

Thank You!

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