Cracking website perfection

Tips for writing website content

By Kim McCotter

"Put the most interesting content at the top of the page. Arranging your content from most interesting to least interesting helps users scan your page quickly. Make your site easy to read and users will thank you..."

It's easy to hold some romantic notion that potential patients are going to brew up a mug of coffee, curl up with their iPad on the couch and browse through every detail of your website for a while. Forget that. If people are visiting your site, they are there for a reason. If you can't capture them in the first few seconds, they will bounce and click on another Google listing.

With this in mind, before you even start to develop your website and write content, think carefully about who you are trying to attract to your practice - this group is known as your target audience. Writing content becomes easier when you write with an audience or person in mind.

Remember, a website for a dental practice shouldn't just be an encyclopedia of techniques, a CV of qualifications or a showcase of case studies. It should be a tool that works hard to build your brand, connect with potential patients and facilitate appointments.

To convert online visitors on your website into patients in your chair, you need an attractive and functional website with compelling content.

Be direct

People on the web want the information they want quickly and easily. To gather information in an efficient manner, we subconsciously employ different "scanning" techniques when we look at web pages.

From studies that track how our eyes move when looking at websites, we can quantify this information gathering process. The resultant patterns can then be used to redesign websites so the most crucial information is in the most prominent locations.

The first article in this series referred to users employing an F pattern (or golden triangle) when viewing Search Engine Result Pages (SERPs). This is when users concentrate on the top left hand area of the web page and scan down the page using a large F pattern. E shapes and inverted L shapes also appeared depending on the type of website being viewed, but the overall implication is the same.

When writing content, use simple sentences that contain a verb, a subject and an active voice. Group your sentences into paragraphs that are less than 50 words long and contain one core idea.

Dentists try to say too much on each website page; stick to 250-500 words per page. If you want to add 10 dentist biographies to your "about us" page, break them up into sub pages.

Increasing readability is about polishing, refining and eliminating unnecessary words. Often, less is more.

Use links

The web is a non-linear interactive environment where users engage with the content presented. Using internal hyperlinks attracts attention and aids navigation through your website. Facebook is a great example of how users instinctively use links to move amongst friends, photos, games and posts.

Editing

When you write and edit your content in one hit, mistakes happen. Take your time and be prepared to review your work a number of times. A fresh set of eyes is a great   way to pickup errors, but better still, use a professional editor or copywriter.

Cracking perfection

I have seen practitioners change and finesse content for years before going live. Worse still, writing content goes into the too hard basket next to the late BAS statement and incomplete succession plans.

Here is the secret - your website will never be perfect. The sooner you understand this, the less sleep you will lose. It is much easier to start with a modest 3-5 page site than trying to pen a detailed 20-page website from scratch.

Remember, you can and should come back frequently to make changes.

Writing for the web is a continuous evolution process, not a one off event. If it takes a while to get organised, that is ok, just get started and do a bit each week.

The next article in the series will focus on selecting imagery for your website.

About the author

Mr Kim McCotter is Business Development & Marketing Manager at Levitch Design Associates. With a background and passion for business and marketing, Kim comes to LDA with experience in both service and product based industries. Having over five years of professional services experience and five years of marketing experience, he brings a fresh and professional approach to LDA. Kim holds a Bachelor of Business (UTS), Masters of Business in Marketing (UTS), and a Certificate in Digital Marketing (ADMA). He is continually investigating marketing and business techniques to find the next competitive edge. His methodical business development and marketing approach is outcome driven, his initiatives will be beneficial to the future success of our clients. He can be contacted on (02) 9496-5700.

Front load content by putting the most interesting content at the top of the page. Arranging your content from most interesting to least interesting helps users scan your page quickly. Make your site easy to read and users will thank you.

Be original

Let's be honest, most people hate marketing messages. Using marketing speak, jargon, exaggerated claims or overt self-promotion destroys your credibility. Don't do it.

It may sound cheesy, but visitors want authenticity. If you copy and paste from other websites, your website will look like a dog's breakfast. The effort required to get a patchwork of sentences to work together is more effort than it is worth. If you get stuck for ideas, imagine that you are being asked a series of questions by a potential patient, like:

• Who are you?
• What can you offer me?
• Why should I care?
• When can I get an appointment?
• Where is your surgery?
• How do I get there?
• Where is the nearest parking?

Use headings and sub headings

You should be able to flick through a page in two seconds and understand the topic and decide whether the content is interesting. Headings and sub headings are used to increase readability by breaking up content into easily understandable chunks. To be effective, they should be short, sharp and descriptive.

If you can't see a heading or sub heading on the screen as you scroll down a page, it is a sign that more sub headings are required.

The end of verbosity

Plenty of research has been conducted to show that reading speeds are consistently 10%-30% lower online versus print. Hypotheses range from physical causes (eye fatigue) to psychological (increased cognitive load due to unstructured content online). Really it doesn't matter; just accept that users only absorb a small part of what they see online.