Writing and Editing for the Web

Tips from the Office of Communications and Marketing

Before you begin writing ask yourself:

- Who is my target audience and what are their information needs?
- What are my strategic goals?

Understanding Web readers

- 79 percent scan rather than read information
- Reading from a computer screen is 25 percent slower than reading from paper
- Information is accessed non-sequentially, as users can enter a site at any page
- They want to find information or answers quickly
- They want to know where to go for more information
- They don’t always know exactly what they are looking for

Some Web writing basics:

- Keep content short and simple
- The shorter the better:
  - 4-8 word headlines
  - 25-50 word summary/intro sentences
  - single-sentence or 40-70 word paragraphs
- Write great headlines and intro sentences (this is often the only text your visitor will read before linking to the next page)
- Write for how people search (use words that are likely to be in the vernacular of the reader)
- Include words that drive action (get the visitor to do something: ‘apply now’, ‘read more about...’, ‘check out the SCU virtual tour’).
- Write active content (Active-- ‘You’ll learn and live in a Residential Learning Community that will help you grow

http://www.scu.edu/webpublishing/content/writing.cfm (1 of 2) 6/20/2005 4:03:40 PM
socially and academically’. Passive-- 'Santa Clara University offers residential learning communities where students grow socially and academically.')

- Add links to your content. Readers are more likely to read a paragraph that contains a link.
- Bullets, boldface, and pull-quotes give readers reference points.
- Edit. Edit. Edit. (Make sure it is clean and has no errors)

Before you publish your content, ask yourself:

- Is it clear?
- Is there a simpler way to say this?
- Is there a shorter way to say this?
- Is it necessary?

Search Engines: Will they pick up your Web site and key words?

- Search engines rank keywords by starting at the top of a page.
- Their priorities are: Titles, headlines, the first 25 words, and hyperlinked text.
- The more you update your Web site homepage, the more search visits you will get.

Final Thoughts:

- Content should only exist once within a site; but it can be linked to from multiple places.
- Have expiration or review dates so your content stays fresh.
- Linking drives action and helps people get to the content they are looking for.
- Avoid making readers scroll for information.

Additional information on creating Web content

Monthly Web Tips More pointers on how to create user friendly Web content