

# Seven Tips to Sharpen Your Web Site's Content

By Jennifer Roche, Bowerbird Communications

Have you weeded your web content lately? Spruced up your scannability? Well-honed content can help you improve your site's usability. It can also help you transform more of your visitors into clients and more clients into regulars. Here are seven tips to get started.

**1. Discard meaningless marketing terms and jargon.**

Strike sentences from your site that read like this real-life clunker: "We leverage our industry expertise and thought leadership into tangible assets that provide windows into the future of what is possible."

Nicholas Gracilla, owner of Chicago-based Neoteric Design ([www.NeotericDesign.com](http://www.NeotericDesign.com)), a web design firm, says, "The web is straight-forward and pragmatic. Fluff's out." Make sure your content is direct and succinct.

**2. Write for "scannability," not completeness.**

"People are scanning for what they're searching for, and it's very hard to do that when you write for completeness," adds Gracilla. Set up a hierarchical design for the presentation of your content, such as using large headers followed by smaller headers and bullet points. This will help your visitors move more quickly through your site.

**3. Put the point you want to make at the top of every page.**

"A lot of people put a lot of text on their site because they can," observes Lee Stral, president of Chicago-based Essential Presence ([www.comeback.com](http://www.comeback.com)), a web development firm. "I don't want to discourage people from using the medium, but if you expect visitors to read through it all to find what's important, they won't. Put the main points at the top of the page and then you can expand below."

**4. Every web page should have your company contact information, including your name, phone number and web address.**

"People often print out web pages and information about an individual product, and then they might have a piece without a way to contact the merchant," says Stral. Make it easy for them to find you again.

**5. Provide in-depth information for customers who want it.**

Paul Teven, who owns the retail store Best Vacuum ([www.bestvacuum.com](http://www.bestvacuum.com)) on North Lincoln Avenue and jumped online in 1995, said the number one thing his online customers expect is depth of content. "A lot of information is better than a little," he says. "Not every consumer wants it, but it must be available for the consumers who do. The ease of navigation pertaining to the content is important, too." Don't let potential customers go looking for the product information they need on a competitor's site.

Providing in-depth content doesn't have to conflict with the goal of keeping your site scannable. According to Gracilla, you can give customers the option of clicking deeper into your site to get to the information they're seeking. "Recent usability studies reveal that if they're getting closer to the information they want with each click, they're okay with (the additional clicking)," he says.

**6. Put your face, name and a brief biography on your site.**

These final tips are drawn from my own experience. For the past two years, I have served as a preliminary round reviewer for the annual Webby Awards, an industry “gold-standard” honor for web sites.

Without fail, I always see at least a handful of entrants with gorgeous sites and enticing products who neglect to reveal any real person behind their work. The absence of someone standing behind your services (and the implication that the products come from some magical, unpopulated place) can cause potential clients to doubt your business’s credibility. Share who you are.

**7. Don’t forget your “bricks and mortar” address.**

Posting your address gives you another opportunity to reaffirm your business’s credibility. It helps your potential clients locate you on the planet, and it shows that you exist in the non-Internet world, too. (Even if working long hours on your web site calls that into question.)

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