

The Social Media Hat
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2013 Focus Series

Creating Great Content





For most small business owners, one of the more challenging aspects of their website project will be to write about their business. Though it might seem easy to talk about yourself, most owners are intimidated by the pressure of having to write “great” content that will be seen by many potential customers. While there are many different kinds of content, including blogs, articles and press releases, this article is going to focus on the pages of your website. It will take time, but if you follow our process for writing copy, the end result will be text for your website that will be an effective tool for converting casual visitors into buying customers.

The Plan

First, you need a plan. Start by creating a map for yourself in the form of a site outline. A typical outline might look like this:

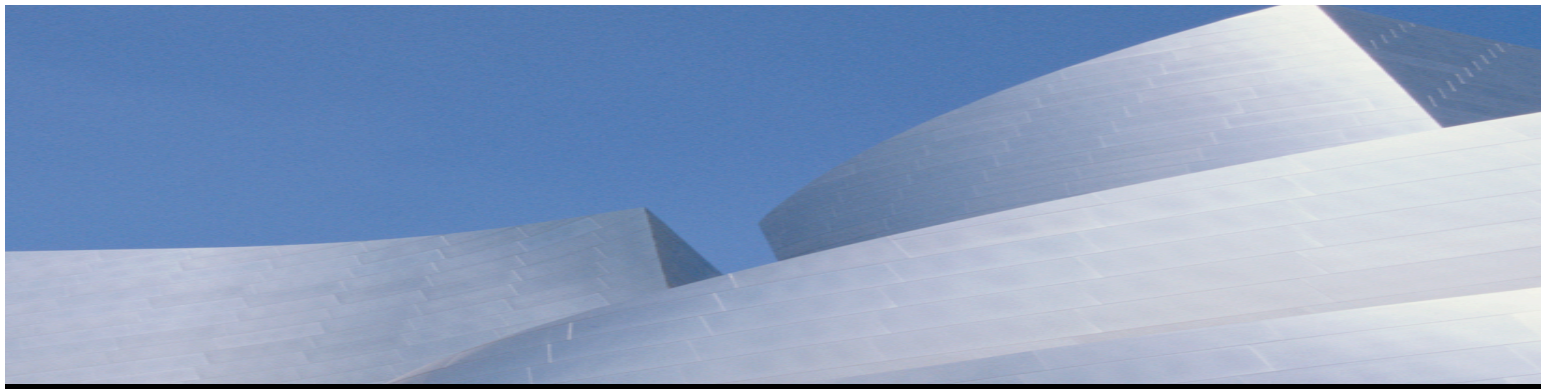
- Home
- About
 - Team
 - Experience
- Services
 - Service A
 - Service B
- Contact

Your outline needs to be unique and customized for you and your business, but it also needs to make sense. The top-level bullets (i.e. Home, About, Services, Contact) will typically end up as your main menu items on your website, while sub-bullets (i.e. Service A, Service B) will be submenu items. There is no limit to the number of items you can put into your outline, as long as it makes sense to do so. Always keep in mind that what you’re creating needs to be understood by your site visitors. For instance, if you have a Services top-level item, it makes sense to have all services listed within it as separate pages, and not some specific services also listed as a top-level item. If you have a specific service or aspect that you wish to call out, there are other ways to do that through the use of sidebars, graphics, slideshows, and so on.

The Pages

Once you have your outline set, you’ll know what pages you need to write text for. You can start at the top and work your way down, or start with whatever page you think you have the most material to work with – wherever you feel comfortable starting, so long as you start.

I recommend creating a Word document for each individual page. Make sure you save it and save it often so you don’t lose any work. Save it with a meaningful name, and keep all your documents in a specific folder. If you have specific images you want to incorporate onto specific pages, insert them into the the



Word document where you want them, but also include the image file in the folder with the document for your developer to use.

If you are able to simply start typing and can write whatever page you're working on, great! Carry on. If you're stuck though, or don't know where to begin, here are some suggestions.

First, start by typing whatever comes to mind. It doesn't matter if it's complete sentences – don't worry about grammar or spelling initially. Just get your ideas down in front of you. For this particular page of your site, what would your customers want to read? If you were a client, what would you be looking for? Pretend that a client stopped you on the street or called you and asked you to talk about this particular subject for a while. What would you say?

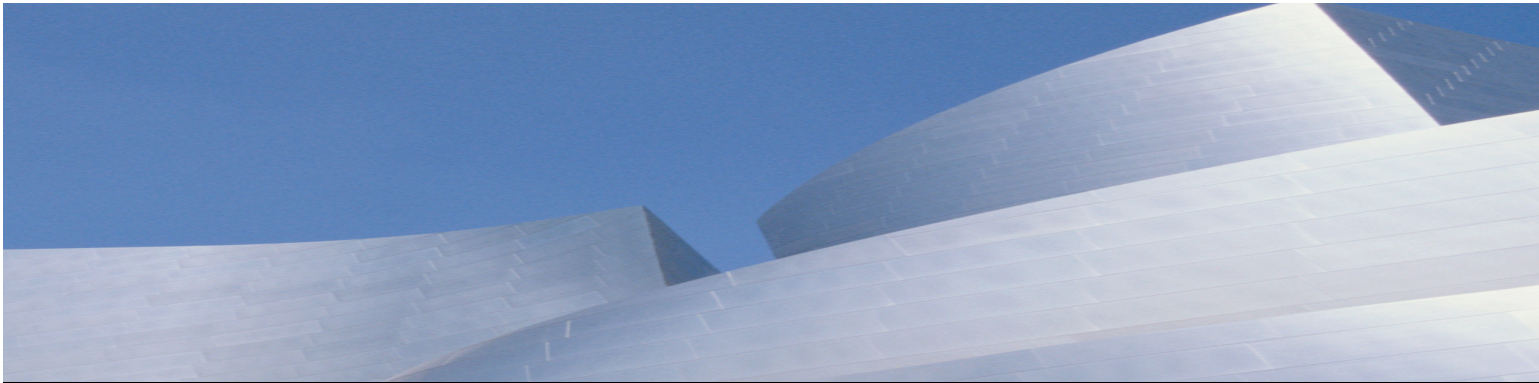
Include facts and statistics. We don't want to be overwhelmed with statistics, but if we can read something verifiable about a business, that helps reinforce what we're being told. If appropriate and possible, include nice images of charts and graphs.

It's OK to use terms and jargon, as long as you define them. The Drupal websites that we build can include an automated Glossary that will integrate with your content, or, you can simply define a term in parentheses or as part of your explanation.

Once you've gotten some ideas down, try to organize them a bit. Start the page off with a statement or question that will interest the reader, and then proceed from there. Do not be afraid to write too much – elaborate on your points whenever possible. You can also use bullets and numbers to list or highlight points, but don't use too many. You should also break your page up into sections and insert a section title, like I have above. This helps keep your ideas organized and focused, and helps readers understand where you're going.

It's OK if you end up with a long page of text. In fact, that's great! The more text you have, the better your site will rank with search engines and the more informed your readers would be. You'll want to talk to your web developer about adding a brief list of sections, like a table of contents, at the top so that readers can skip to a specific section if they want. Breaking the content up into multiple pages with Previous and Next buttons may also be a possibility.

Once you've finished a page, read it through in its entirety. Share it with others to read. Make sure that it's understandable, organized, grammatically correct and completely error-free. Do not hesitate to revise it as often as needed. You should also make an effort to review and revise pages on your Live website regularly as information changes over time, and you may have additional information that you can add and share.



The Push

When writing, here are some additional things to keep in mind in order to make your copy even more effective.

What's In It For Me?

Always remember your target audience and write to them. Why should they be interested in you? What benefits can you offer? What problems can you solve?

What Do I Do Next?

Always include directions in your writing. If someone is interested in you or what you're saying, make it as easy as possible for them to *take the next step*, whatever that step might be, by helping them out. Maybe it's as simple as saying, "Give us a call for more information" or directing them to a form or contact page. Whatever it is, make it clear for a visitor how to take action.

Who Are You?

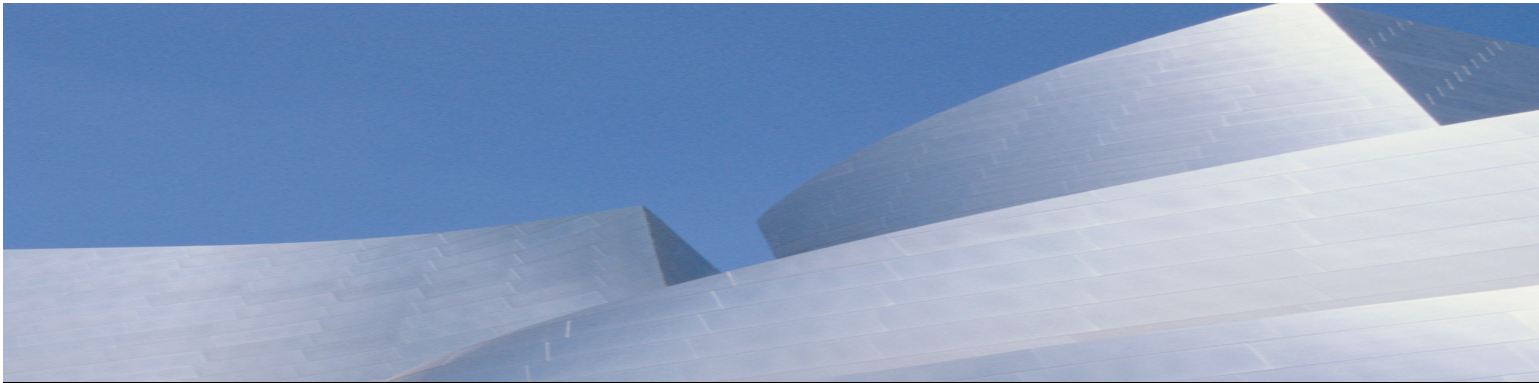
Chances are, visitors to your website have never heard of you. This is your chance to tell them who you are and, more importantly, *what they can expect from you*. This should not be limited to just your "About" page, though that's a great place to elaborate on your experience and expertise and history. Throughout your site, you need to reinforce the idea that you're an expert and that you can be trusted. One of your goals should always be to get visitors to "know, like and trust you." Including personal, but important information, is a great way to accomplish that.

Who Are You Targeting?

If you haven't already, you should start a conversation with your developer about "keywords." It's important that you decide what keywords and phrases you're going to target, and your developer should be able to help you through that process.

Your keywords should reflect the customers or businesses you want to target – these should be the phrases that a potential customer would put into a search engine. In order for your site to come up, those phrases should appear within your site.

So, now that you have some basic text in place, it's time to revise and expand it based on your chosen keywords. Replace existing words and phrases with your targeted keywords wherever possible. Do you have specific pages devoted to each keyword? You should! Don't be afraid to add more pages or revise your outline in order to maximize your keyword usage.



The Payoff

If you've gone through all of the above steps, you should have an extremely effective collection of pages for your new website. Writing copy for your site should never be a project that you do just once – you should regularly revise pages and add new content. The more often you write, the easier it will get, and you will be rewarded for your efforts. Your site's search engine rankings will improve and you'll get more traffic to your site. More of your visitors will become interested in you and willing to hire you, or take whatever action you stipulated in your content, and your revenues will improve.