Writing Web Content that Works

Janice (Ginny) Redish, Ph.D.
Redish & Associates, Inc.
Bethesda, Maryland, USA

+1 301–229–3039
ginny@redish.net
www.redish.net

@GinnyRedish

May 2012
Topics for this morning

- Setting the context
- Planning successful conversations
- Answering site visitors’ questions
- Organizing the conversation
- Writing the conversation
- Checking for success
Setting the context
Sharing stories

You use web sites that others have developed.

- When did you last go to the web?
- Why did you go to the web?
- What were you trying to do or what were you looking for?

Share your story with your neighbor.

Flickr cc photo by theworldcafe
What do people want from web sites?

Content
Information
To do a task
To satisfy *their* goals

People just want to
- get an answer
- do a task
- solve a problem
- engage in a social conversation
Navigation and search are critical
Good, clear design is critical
Technology that works is critical
But they all support the content
Every use of your web site is a conversation started by the site visitor

How well does your site converse with your site visitors?
You site converses well only if...

Your site visitors can

- **find** what *they* need
- **understand** what they find
- **act** appropriately on that understanding in the time and effort that *they* think it is worth

Find → Understand → Act
Your web content must meet both...

Your goals

Your site visitors' goals (and their reality)

Successful web content and conversations

If you don't design for your site visitors' realities, you are not likely to meet your goals!
Planning successful conversations

Flickr cc photo by Polandeze
Plan before you write

Think first.

Write second.

Why? (your purposes)

Who? (your site visitors, personas)

When and why?
(your site visitors’ goals, tasks, conversations)
Why? (your purposes)

- Align with the business' overall strategy and goals
- Be specific
- Be measurable
- Focus on your site visitors / readers

€→€

€→€
Be specific

THIS WEEK: START WITH PURPOSE

If a coworker interrupts us while we’re writing a letter and asks, "What are you doing?" most of us will answer "Writing a letter."

That answer reveals a focus on the written product, not on its purpose. Such product-focused thinking keeps our writing from being as effective as it could be.

This week, when you start each writing job, take a few seconds to think about your purpose—about what effect you want to have on your reader. This week, if a coworker interrupts your writing and asks what you’re doing, be prepared to answer (for example), "I’m trying to get this customer to forgive us for a shipping mistake we made."

Kenneth W. Davis

http://www.manageryourwriting.com/
Be measurable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>When you write this type of content</th>
<th>what do you want to happen?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Proposal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email to get funding to go to a conference</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report with recommendations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Focus on your site visitors

We want to

- sell products
- have people buy our products
- inform people about ...
- answer people's questions about …
- tell people how to do [this task]
- have people do the task correctly
Who? (Your personas)

Whom are you conversing with?

- Name each group.
  - Travelers
    - frequent
    - occasional
  - Hip, young professionals
  - Seniors

Always name people.
- ✓ Travel agents
- × Travel agencies

© 2012, Janice (Ginny) Redish

Writing Web Content that Works
What should you keep in mind about these people?

- Add adjectives or phrases that describe them.
- Examples:
  - time constraints (busy? multi-tasking?)
  - attitudes (worried? curious?)
  - subject matter knowledge
  - primary language
  - reading ability
  - computer and web experience

Not what content they are looking for. We'll get to that later.
Create personas to converse with

Mark Yuchenko  |  Chief Administrative Officer, Town of Canmore |  Existing Municipal Client

“When I have a question or issue, I just want to pick up the phone, call someone I know and trust, settle the issue, and move on with my day.”

Mark is a hard working public servant who has roots in the oil and gas industry. He enjoys working for the public and understands the pressures of balancing public interests, environmental issues, and political pressures. Mark always says that your head can be in the clouds as long as you have the heart to work in the real world.

Mark is relied upon by his town council, mayor, and community to make the right decisions for the town. He is respected in his field but he has lots of pressure to make the right decisions on a vendor.

He is a current customer and values EPCOR as a partner. So far, he sees EPCOR as a vendor who does not let him down. It is important to Mark that his vendors can work with existing systems seamlessly and without the need to retrofit expensive parts.

Mark is always on the lookout for vendors who can make the experience worry-free and help make him and council look good to his community.

Mark is efficient, effective, and people-oriented.

About Mark
Has a family, 52 years old
Has an Engineering degree & an MBA
Was in oil and gas in Calgary before going into public service in Canmore
Savvy; worked hard to get where he is

Services he recognizes / uses
- Water, waste water treatment
- Conservation, environment & infrastructure
- Regulations and changes to regulations
- Investors; area (on all websites), corporate, operations, newsroom

Issues or Pain Points
- Infrastructure is depleting and there isn’t enough money to address it with competing requests for funds.
- Time is also an issue in terms of influencing public opinion.
- Wants to please council members to some extent. Read-value and safety are important.
- Public response is important. The public wants low rates and a good environmental record.
- Business stakeholders and environmental lobbyists are watching and lobbying him and council on both sides.

Questions
- How does EPCOR compare with competitors in terms of cost, value, performance (technical & financial), service, reliability, communications, operations, governance, risk, safety, billing, green options, corporate responsibility and image?
- If were to continue to manage this account going forward, how could I interact with EPCOR better?
- When will EPCOR have live chat for business customers? Is there a short cut or dedicated person to our company account?

Interests
- Volunteering at the local food bank and Boys & Girls Club - “giving back”
- Reading the Harvard Business Review
- Educating his teenage kids
- Techie gadgets
- Golfing, skiing, vacationing in warm and exotic places
- Invades
- Wine

Epcor Utilities, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, used with permission
When and why?
(Site visitor’s conversations)
Answering site visitors’ questions
What types of pages does a typical site have?

- Home
  - Multi-purpose

- Navigation
  - Pathway page: scan, select, and move on

- Destination – place to do the task
  - Information page: scan and get information
  - Forms page: scan and give information
  - Other transaction page: scan and act
North American Partners in Anesthesia
Our Unmatched Anesthesia Experience. Your CHI Advantage.

Patient Info
Hospital Anesthesia Management Services
Anesthesia Careers
Additional Products and Services
About NAPA
Contact NAPA

The Leader in Anesthesia Management Solutions

Founded in 1988, North American Partners in Anesthesia (NAPA) is the largest anesthesia management company in the U.S. With 700+ clinicians and nearly 500,000 cases performed annually, NAPA delivers more anesthesia than any other provider and is consistently cited as having the industry's most respected clinical staff, management leadership, and evidence-based quality initiatives—resulting in maximized CHI performance, reduced costs and consistent outcomes and patient satisfaction.

NAPA serves hospitals ranging from small community facilities to the nation's largest health systems, including centers of excellence, teaching and specialty hospitals, anesthesia residency programs and more. This experience has enabled NAPA to develop the systems and processes that deliver the services, satisfaction and cost you desire—an anesthesia service that is 100% in sync with your hospital's mission. Our anesthesia management services offer the best solution for any hospital interested in anesthesia outsourcing and anesthesia services.

Hospital Spotlight
Maria Fareri Children's Hospital

Maria Fareri Children's Hospital at Westchester Medical Center is much more than a spectator-setting, advanced healthcare setting.

Why NAPA?

NAPA is one of the most respected anesthesia management providers, demanding for our services is surging. As a result, we are always seeking to add new talent to our staff. NAPA offers a comprehensive array of benefits...

www.napaanesthesia.com
DELIVERING
Your Most Profitable Guest
You need visibility. You need more guests. We can deliver both through powerful, data-driven hotel Internet marketing that consistently produces higher returns. Let our hospitality-specific solutions maximize your direct bookings.

View Our Solutions

www.vizergy.com

© 2012, Janice (Ginny) Redish  Writing Web Content that Works  Slide 26
The best free way to manage your money.

Mint brings all your financial accounts together online or on your mobile device, automatically categorizes your transactions, lets you set budgets and helps you achieve your savings goals. Watch the video | Learn more

Get started here

www.mint.com

© 2012, Janice (Ginny) Redish

Writing Web Content that Works
Makes your life easier

At Mint, we believe money is for living. So we make everything simple and streamlined. Sign up takes less than five minutes. Then Mint automatically pulls all your financial information into one place, so you can finally get the entire picture.
Remember kids, safety first

Bank-level security
Mint uses the same 128-bit encryption and physical security that banks use. Our practices are monitored and certified by TRUSTe, VeriSign and Hackersafe, and supported by RSA Security.

No one can move any money
Mint is a “read-only” service. You can organize and analyze your finances, but you can’t move funds between—or out of—any account using Mint. And neither can anyone else.
Summarizing so far

- Content = conversation.
- Site visitors start the conversation.
- Know your purposes, your personas, their conversations.
- Converse with your personas.
- “Hear” what they are asking and answer their questions.
- Don’t hog the conversation – keep it short.
- Make it personal.
- Make it visual.
Break

After the break

- Organizing – headlines, headings, key message first, bite / snack / meal
- Writing the conversation – sentences and words
- Checking for success
Organizing the conversation
About High Blood Pressure

What is High Blood Pressure?

Blood pressure is the force of blood against the artery walls. It is often written or stated as two numbers. The first or top number represents the pressure when the heart contracts. This is called systolic pressure. The second or bottom number represents the pressure when the heart rests between beats. This is called diastolic pressure.

Blood pressure is traditionally measured with a device called a sphygmomanometer. It measures blood pressure in millimeters of mercury (mmHg). An inflatable cuff is wrapped around the arm and is inflated to squeeze the blood vessels in the arm. The health care provider uses a stethoscope to listen to the pulse as the pressure is released in order to determine the systolic and diastolic pressure. Some blood pressure testing devices are now electronic and provide digital readouts of the blood pressure measurement and pulse rate.

Blood pressure normally rises and falls throughout the day. When it consistently stays too high for too long, it is called hypertension. The Seventh Joint National Committee on Prevention, Detection, Evaluation, and Treatment of High Blood Pressure notes these levels for defining normal and high blood pressure in adults:

- High blood pressure or hypertension for adults is defined as a systolic blood pressure of 140 mmHg or higher or a diastolic blood pressure of 90 mmHg or higher.
- Normal blood pressure is a systolic blood pressure of less than 120 mmHg and a diastolic blood pressure of less than 80 mmHg.
- Prehypertension is defined as a systolic blood pressure of 120–139 mmHg or a diastolic blood pressure of 80–89 mmHg. Persons with prehypertension are at increased risk to progress to hypertension.

If the systolic and diastolic blood pressure levels are in different categories, blood pressure status is defined according to the higher category. For example, a person with a high systolic pressure but a normal diastolic pressure will be considered to have high blood pressure (sometimes referred to as systolic hypertension). A person with a high diastolic pressure but a normal systolic pressure will be considered to have high blood pressure also (sometimes referred to as diastolic hypertension).

High blood pressure for adults will usually be measured on at least two different doctor visits before a diagnosis of high blood pressure is made.

For children, high blood pressure is determined by comparing the child's blood pressure with the distribution of blood pressure for children of similar age and height. A child whose blood pressure is
Don’t lecture.
Don’t hog the conversation.
Take turns.
“Hear” the site visitor’s next question.

www.netdoctor.co.uk/diseases/facts/asthmachildren.htm
Physical Exercise

The hardest part of an exercise routine is getting started. Once you've established a regular pattern of exercise, you'll find yourself following it. So, how do you get started? Well, first of all, consult your doctor. Your doctor can recommend the specific kinds of exercise for your own individual needs. Generally, however, these guidelines should get you going.

First of all, exercise will only become a habit if it's fun! Pick something you will enjoy doing. If you like being with a group of people, try a team sport like basketball or soccer. You don't have to be a super athlete. Anyone can exercise. Social activities like dancing and mail-walking are also good. If you're more of a loner, try bicycling or swimming.

Don't kid yourself. Be honest about what you realistically think you can do. If you have always hated to climb stairs, step aerobics probably isn't for you. Maybe a walk around the neighborhood would be more pleasant. Many people today are walking toward fitness.

Consider your current state of physical fitness. If you haven't exercised in years, you'll definitely want to start with some modest activities. As you get adjusted, you can increase your activity.

Consider your schedule. Are you a morning person? Then plan to exercise in the morning. If you're addicted to your snooze button, plan to exercise in the evening. Start with just a small block of time, maybe fifteen minutes. As you get into your routine, you probably won't mind increasing to twenty, and then thirty, minutes. In order to be effective, you'll need to repeat your exercise routine 3 or 4 times per week.

Will you exercise at home or at a fitness center? Selecting a fitness center can be a challenge, but you may find the community support motivational. Will you need any special equipment? The variety of exercise equipment available for purchase today can be overwhelming. Be sure to buy the proper equipment.
Break your content into pieces with headings.

Verbs – calls to action make good headings.

Notice the difference in headlines:

Physical Exercise

Physical Exercise: Getting Started

---

**Physical Exercise: Getting Started**

The hardest part of an exercise routine is getting started. Once you’ve established a regular pattern of exercise, you’ll find yourself following it. So, how do you get started?

**Consult your doctor**
First, talk to your doctor. Your doctor can recommend specific kinds of exercise for your own individual needs.

Also, consider these guidelines. They should get you going.

**Pick something you will enjoy doing**
Exercise will only become a habit if it’s fun! If you like being with a group of people, try a team sport like basketball or soccer. You don’t have to be a super athlete. Anyone can exercise. Social activities like dancing and mall-walking are also good. If you’re more of a loner, try bicycling or swimming.

**Be honest about what you can do**
Don’t kid yourself. If you have always hated to climb stairs, step aerobics probably isn’t for you. Maybe a walk around the neighborhood would be more pleasant. Many people today are walking toward fitness.

**Consider your current state of physical fitness**
If you haven’t exercised in years, you’ll definitely want to start with some modest activities. As you get adjusted, you can increase your activity.

**Consider your schedule**
Are you a morning person? Then plan to exercise in the morning. If you’re addicted to your snooze button, plan to exercise in the evening. Start with just a small block of time, maybe fifteen minutes. As you get into your routine, you probably won’t mind increasing to twenty, and then thirty, minutes. In order to be effective, you’ll need to repeat your exercise routine 3 or 4 times per week.

**Decide where to exercise**
Will you exercise at home or at a fitness center? Selecting a fitness center can be a challenge, but you may find the community support motivational. Will you need any special equipment? The variety of exercise equipment available for purchase today can be overwhelming. Be sure to buy the proper equipment.
For articles, use a medium length headline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>This feature</th>
<th>improved click-through</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thumbnail image with headline</td>
<td>27% higher than no image</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 words in headline</td>
<td>21% higher than other lengths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Odd number &quot;5 keys to...&quot;</td>
<td>20% higher than even number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colon or dash and subtitle</td>
<td>9% higher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Headline as question</td>
<td>higher (% not specified)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Study by Outbrain.com, reported by Kelly Reeves, June 3, 2011
Include informative headings

- Headings help by
  - breaking up the information
  - making the information manageable
  - creating visual separation on the web page
  - drawing the eyes
  - providing context so people can make sense of what follows

- Thinking about headings helps authors analyze the information.

If you write page titles, headlines, and headings using site visitors' key words, your pages will come up high in search engine results.
Greenland Ice is Melting – Faster and Faster!

A new paper by scientists of Utrecht University, Institute for Marine and Atmospheric Research, in collaboration with colleagues from the Netherlands Royal Meteorological Institute, Delft University of Technology, Bristol University (UK) and the Jet Propulsion Laboratory (USA) was published in Science recently. The work used the Regional Atmospheric Climate Model to calculate surface processes over Greenland, satellite radar measurements to determine iceberg production and ice sheet mass loss from the Gravity Recovery and Climate Mission (GRACE) satellites.
Start with your key message

“Hear” your site visitor’s question after each sentence you write.

Greenland Ice Melting Faster Than Expected

The Greenland ice sheet is melting faster than expected, according to a new study led by a University of Alaska Fairbanks researcher and published in the journal *Hydrological Processes*.

Study results indicate that the ice sheet may be responsible for nearly 25 percent of global sea rise in the past 13 years. The study also shows that seas now are rising by more than 3 millimeters a year—more than 50 percent faster than the average for the 20th century.
Nielsen and Pernice,
*Eye-Tracking Web Usability*

Also, see Redish,
*Letting Go of the Words*,
102 – 106
Layer information (bite, snack, meal)

Bite: headline

Snack: quick summary; key message first

Meal: details
Even the whole meal should be easy to digest.

Concept from Leslie O'Flahavan
www.ewriteonline.com

NSF news example
Writing the conversation
Keep it short and easy to scan

Find → Understand → Act

I make jewelry. If I want to sell through Etsy, how does it work?

How does it work?

List item
You list the item on Etsy for a fee.

Get paid
Shoppers find your item and pay you directly.

Ship item
You ship the item to your customer.
Converse with your site visitor

Amazon.com

Sign In
What is your e-mail address?

My e-mail address is:

Do you have an Amazon.com password?

- No, I am a new customer.
- Yes, I have a password:

Forgot your password?

Sign in using our secure server

Caroline Jarrett
Gerry Gaffney
Use pronouns

Pricing of our services is dependent on the level of assistance and service chosen.

Our prices depend on how much help you need and what we do for you.
Focus on action – verbs, not nouns

Upon successful completion of the online renewal transaction, printing the membership card will be an option.

When you finish renewing online, you can print your membership card.

Renew online. Then, print your membership card.
Use the shortest, simplest word with the right meaning

- We all read the short, simple, common words faster.
- People inside an organization overestimate the words people outside know by about 30 percent.

X "dumbing down"

✔ respecting your busy site visitors' time
Helping low-literacy users helps everyone

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tasks completed successfully</th>
<th>% of tasks Before</th>
<th>After</th>
<th>Improvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low-literacy web users</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>+77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-literacy web users</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>+37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All users</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>+52%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time spent on tasks</th>
<th>Time (minutes) Before</th>
<th>After</th>
<th>Improvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low-literacy web users</td>
<td>22:16</td>
<td>9:30</td>
<td>+134%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-literacy web users</td>
<td>14:19</td>
<td>5:05</td>
<td>+182%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All users</td>
<td>17:50</td>
<td>6:45</td>
<td>+164%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What's wrong with this sentence?

Interested persons, on or before June 14, 2013, may submit to the Hearing Clerk, 1000 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20000, written comments regarding this proposal. Faxed comments will be accepted at 202-555-1234. To submit comments electronically, go to this site:
Always, think “conversation”

We invite you to comment on this proposal.

Deadline: June 14, 2013

Submit written comments

electronically at
www.....

by mail to
Hearing Clerk
1000 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20000

by fax to
202-555-1234
Attn: John Jones
Checking for success

Flickr cc photo by Per Ola Wiberg (Powi).away
Read, edit, revise, collaborate

- First draft ≠ final draft
- Read your work out loud.
- Ask someone else to read it out loud.
  - Don’t ask if they liked it.
  - Ask what message they got from it.
- Listen! Then revise.
- Work together.

Flickr cc photo by wakacheeka
Do usability testing

- Carol M. Barnum, *Usability Testing Essentials: Ready, Set...Test!*
- Jeffrey Rubin and Dana Chisnell, *Handbook of Usability Testing: How to Plan, Design, and Conduct Effective Tests*

[www.usability.gov](http://www.usability.gov)
Walk your personas through their conversations
Thank you
Obrigada

Janice (Ginny) Redish
Redish & Associates, Inc.
Bethesda, MD, USA

ginny@redish.net
www.redish.net
+1 301 229 3039