

HOW TO GET YOUR WEB CLIENTS TO DELIVER QUALITY CONTENT ON TIME, EVERY TIME



BrainstormDigital



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Things are going well with your client. They've loved your concept and designs, and your team has almost finished building their new website. Your mind has started to shift to new projects, new clients.

All you're missing, to complete this website on schedule, is the copy. But when you ask them when to expect it, you get guilty looks.

“We're working on it...”

“It's a work in progress...”

You suddenly realise it could be months before they deliver.

Your clients are not to blame: They're great at what they do, but they're not writers or editors. This exercise is overwhelming for them.

Still, it's weeks before you can collect your final payment, and considerably stressful for your team, who can't wrap up the site.

We know, because we've been there. Early on in our business life, we too designed websites. And in recent years, we've worked both with agencies like yours, and our own clients, to develop content strategies for the web.

We've seen first-hand how important it is to offer companies, even those with good marketing or comms teams, proper support when they write their own material.

Content Catalyst is our step-by-step process, which you can follow to help your clients deliver quality content on time, every time – without getting too distracted from your own core business.

We hope you find it useful, and look forward to hearing your feedback.

Get that content!



Danny Bermant
Director



Miriam Shaviv
Director of Content

“Where do we even start?”

When it comes to writing their website copy, most of your clients have no idea. That’s why they leave it too late, and get into trouble.

Getting them organised very early (as the website redesign begins) is key. If you can help them understand what steps they need to take, and put the right process in place, they’ll be streets ahead.

It’s worth spending just an hour or two with them, or even organising a dedicated workshop, to establish these 7 points:

- » What makes good content?
- » Who has overall responsibility in their company for producing content, and what other roles do they need to assign?
- » What steps are involved in producing content, from beginning to end?
- » How much time will each step, realistically, take?
- » What deadlines do they need to meet?
- » What is the approvals process for their content?
- » What coordination is necessary with your designers? (See Step 5.)

Document all deadlines; include the final one in your contract.

So what next steps must your clients take to produce their content? Read on.....

TIP: If, despite all your efforts, your client still does not deliver content on time, you don’t want your final payment to be delayed.

Make sure that your contract stipulates that the final payment is due when you deliver the website – and not when it has been populated with content, and made ‘live’.

Alternatively, ensure that once the agreed deadline for content has passed, the final payment is billable.

The good news for most clients is that they don't have to start developing content completely from scratch.

Bits of their old website may be re-usable. There may be valuable information they can draw on, even if they can't use it in its current form. Perhaps there are plans to migrate over entire sections of content – and they need to work out what to leave out.

If their website is large, they probably don't know exactly what they've already created. The client's first job is to log, and assess, the content on their current website.

They shouldn't skip this step even though it can be tedious. In the long-run, it will save them a lot of time, helping them identify what they have to work with, what must be eliminated, and how to prioritise this work.

It will also be really useful for your own web design team to have an accurate idea of what's on the existing site before they plan the Information Architecture and designs.

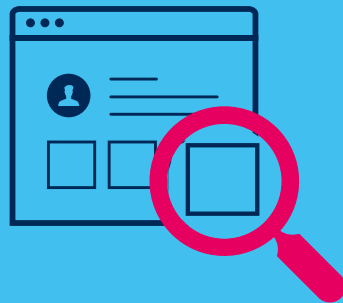
To make the process easy, here is a basic template they can follow, and an example of how to use it:

Page ID	3.1	3.1.1	3.1.2	3.1.3
URL	www.business.com/AboutUs	www/business.com/Aboutus/CEO	www.business.com/Aboutus/Team	www.business.com/Aboutus/Promise
Title	About Us	Message From Our CEO	Meet Our Team	Our Promise To You
Content Format (eg text, video, infographic, PDF etc.)	Text	Video	Text	Text
Style (eg list, story, interview, bio, case study etc.)	Paragraphs	Talking head	Bio	Paragraphs
Topic	Company history, mission, differentiators	How our product changed his life, now he wants to help you too	Biographies of 10 key team members	Pledge of quality of service
Notes	Mission no longer reflects business goals	Updated 2015	AB, CD, EF no longer work here; GH, IJ absent Very text-heavy – Consider videos?	Everyone has pledge of quality of service – hacked
Keep/ Update/ Improve/Discard	Update	Keep	Update, Improve	Discard

The client should include any information that might help them decide whether the content is still useful or not. Additional columns they can consider:

- » Target audience
- » When was the page last updated?
- » Is the content still accurate?
- » Does it align with our business objectives?
- » Wordcount
- » What keywords are used?
- » How has the page performed? (Visits, bounce rate, average time on page, social media links, comments etc.)
- » Call-to-action
- » Conversion data

TIP: If the client is really reluctant to take this step, suggest that they review their most important pages, or start with one section. A mini-audit is better than none!



You know the stereotype of the dinner party bore, who drones on and on about themselves, exasperating everyone around them?
‘...And then, in 1963, I discovered another type of beetle...’

Many companies sound a little bit like this online. They can't stop talking about themselves: Their services, their staff, their successes.

The problem is that this is rarely interesting to their readers, who only want to know one thing:

“What can you do for me?”

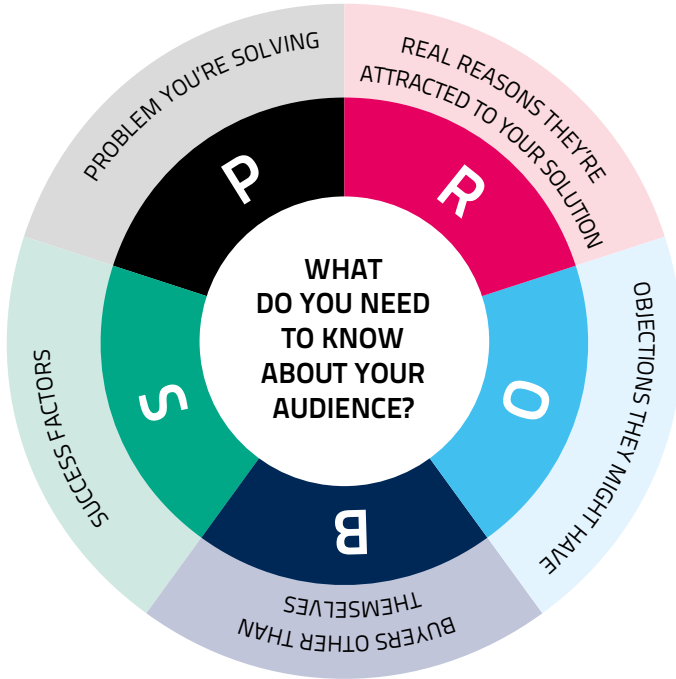
Really persuasive content, that converts, takes up this challenge. The best company websites focus entirely on their readers, speaking their language, relating to their needs and solving their problem.

They get their readers to say:

“This company understands exactly who I am and what I'm looking for!”

(...And hopefully get in touch.)

To help focus their copy on their audience, your client should develop a profile of the groups they are reaching out to. For each one, they need 5 key insights:



- » **Problem you're solving:** What has prompted them to look for a solution like yours? What's really bothering them (as opposed to what they initially claim is bothering them)?
- » **Real reason they're attracted to your solution:** What aspects of your products or services are most attractive or useful to them? (Go in depth. If they say it's 'easy to use' – what exactly do they mean by that?)
- » **Objections they might have:** What reasons do they have not to go ahead with you?
- » **Buyers other than themselves:** Who else is involved in the decision? What are their concerns?
- » **Success factors:** What result would make working with you a success for them?

There are several ways to get this information.

If they have the time and budget, your clients can conduct market research, using focus groups or a survey.

Even smaller, rushed clients can interview existing customers over the phone. Pick 7-8 clients who are similar to the groups targeted on the new website, and keep the questions to a minimum – five is plenty.

They can also speak to client-facing staff, such as their salespeople. They will inevitably have useful insights.

What Does Copy with the Audience At Its Heart Look Like?

- 'Our home printers come in five sizes'
- "If you don't have a home office, you want your printer to be as discreet as possible. Check out our range of small printers, that can be tucked away in a corner of your dining room, and go unnoticed by your dinner guests"**
- 'Our company mission is to offer you outstanding service, and we hope that is reflected on our website'
- "Our website is where you, owners of Tiny Printers, can connect and discuss any technical issues that arise; get quick answers to common questions; and get special cartridge offers, that will save you money."**
- Testimonial: 'I was really happy with the company's service – I can't recommend them enough.'
- Testimonial: "For years, the printer in my living room stood out like a sore thumb. It was really embarrassing. Then I discovered the Tiny Printer. I no longer have to remember to hide it when my friends come around – in fact, it's a talking point!"**

Your client now has a clear picture of who they're going to target.

But what do they need to say on their website in order to convert them? How should they position their business to appeal to them?

If they consistently get the right messages across, their website copy will be very powerful. So now it's time to strategise.

We strongly recommend that they develop a written strategy, even if it's only short. By putting the guiding principles all down on paper, there is clear direction for the writers, and everyone on the team can see and understand what they're trying to accomplish.

Here are some of the points the strategy document must clarify:

- » **What do they want the content to achieve?** For example, keep visitors on the website for longer, reduce bounce rate, increase sales, attract more employee applications etc. Be specific!
- » **Who's the target audience(s)?** Include all the information gathered in Step 3
- » **What responses do they want to evoke in them?** What do they want the text to make the readers think and feel? This will very much shape the text.
- » **What are their key messages?** Decide on 3-4, and put them in order, so the writers know what to emphasise most.
- » **What do they want the audience to do?** The company must always be clear about what next steps it wants its audience to take, for example to download a resource, book an appointment or buy now.
- » **Voice and tone:** What kind of language will appeal to their prospects?
- » **Keywords:** What terms and phrases must they integrate into the copy for SEO purposes?

We've created a website content strategy template you can share with your clients. Get it here:

www.brainstorm-digital.co.uk/ContentStrategy

We all know that strategies are great – in theory. All too often, they're left to rot in a draw and no one ever looks at them again.

To ensure that your client's strategy actually gets implemented, we recommend they draw up a plan showing how the strategy applies on each website page. (Of course, depending on time and resources, they might prefer to plan just major pages, or one section – but the more, the better).

They should note which audience segment the page is aimed at, which key messages and key words they are going to prioritise, and mention any specific themes, facts or stories that need to be included. If there's material on the old website they can draw on, put that down as well.

It's the best way to ensure that your client's writers actually stick to the strategy, and that every page is as focused as it can be.

Here's an example of a Page Plan we created for a large university, based on the content strategy we wrote:

Page	Why Postgraduate?
Target Audience	Post-graduate students, including those from an international background
Objectives	What we want them to think: [Redacted]
	What we want them to feel: [Redacted]
	What we want them to do: [Redacted]
Source material	Draw on: - [Redacted] ...But most of this page will have to be written from scratch
Content notes	[Redacted]
Media types	Text, infographic, headshots
Roles – Who's responsible?	Writing new text: [Redacted]
	Compiling stats and creating infographic: [Redacted]
	Putting together headshots + quotes: [Redacted]
	Final sign-off: [Redacted]
Deadlines	Writing new text: June 3
	Compiling stats and creating infographic: May 24
	Putting together headshots + quotes: June 15
Maintenance / Next revision	Page to be reviewed annually, to ensure statistics are current and students featured are still current.

While your client can develop most of their content independently, there are two points during the process when it's really important they speak to your team.



First, when they create their content strategy.

As your client starts thinking about their audience and what messages they need to hear, they may develop ideas about how to organise their material that will affect the site's Information Architecture – or even the design.

They need to know what's possible from your team, and you need to know what they've got in mind!



Second, before their writers put pen to paper (or rather, fingers to keyboard), they have to see the wireframes. Otherwise, you risk them writing content that doesn't fit in with your designs, creating far more work when everything needs to be cut at the 11th hour.

Make sure these conversations are in their timeline.....



If your client has created a strategy, then planned how it's going to apply to every page, actually writing the copy is the easy part.

Nevertheless, writing an entire website is not for the faint-hearted. And even after going through the whole process, your clients are still not writers.....

So unless they have a good-sized communications or marketing team who are used to writing for the web, they should consider hiring a freelance writer, who can work with them to fulfil their vision.

This will considerably reduce their stress, and result in far sharper copy.

If they do go ahead and write the copy themselves, here are 5 tips you can give them, on how to write well for the web:

- 1 Keep your paragraphs short. It's easier to read on smaller screens.
- 2 Break up text with bullet points, numbered lists and sub-headlines. People tend to scan the page online, so help them get the gist of what you're saying quickly, and skip to the important bits.
- 3 No boring headlines! Nobody will read on if your page title is dull as dishwater.
- 4 Put the most important information at the top of the page. Not everyone will scroll down.
- 5 Keep Search Engine Optimisation in mind. Remember to include keywords, found by your SEO expert.

TIP: For more on how writing for the web differs to writing offline, [direct your clients here](#).

Your client is nearly there... Content is being written, the new website launch is almost in sight.

But with so many pages to create, how do they stay organised? Remember which pages have been completed, which need editing, what's yet to be touched, who's doing what?

The answer, is just one last – thankfully simple - spreadsheet, with the following columns:

- » Page name / number / URL
- » Writing: Status (Not yet / In progress / Complete)
- » Editing: Status (Not yet / In progress / Complete)
- » Approval: Status (Yes / No / Pending)
- » Staff member responsible
- » Notes

This allows them to keep track of exactly where they are in the process.

Tip: If you are racing to get their website up, this is information you might like as well. Ask the client to place this spreadsheet on a shared drive, so you can get an accurate, up-to-the-minute snapshot of the content production. They can even create it in Google Docs.



OUTSOURCE YOUR COPY AND CONTENT PROBLEMS

That's it!

You now have a solid process you can share with your clients, to help them deliver their web content on time and on budget.

But if you have a client where copy is clearly going to impact the website, and you don't want to do this yourself, we can help.

- » We work with agencies to deliver outstanding content strategies and website copy for their clients.
- » Saving you even more time and hassle, we can talk to your clients directly.
- » Our director of content, Miriam Shaviv, is a former award-winning journalist and editor. She has the skills and experience to support you, and build your clients a strategy they'll love.
- » It's like having a journalist on your team.

If that sounds like it could be of use, please do pick up the phone – we'd love to hear from you.

Best wishes,



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