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10 Key Questions for Your Web Copy
by Jonathan Kranz

Today, your website is more than just a media source where people find information about your business; it's the place where many customer relationships begin. In your prospects' minds, their experience of your site is a foreshadowing of their experience with your company or organization.

Establishing a favorable relationship is quite a challenge. But you can improve your odds by challenging your site with these ten important questions:

1) Is your home page empathetic to your visitors?
Be a good host: Instead of confronting your readers with a barrage of chest-beating, "about us" messaging, welcome them with a rapport that demonstrates an understanding of their needs, desires and challenges.

Hint: Try leading your copy with "if you" type statements such as, "If you're in a competitive retail market with razor-thin margins…" or "If you appreciate the unique colors and textures of hand-blown glass…" By doing so, you demonstrate both an understanding of who the visitors are and an appreciation of their values and concerns.

2) Is your site organized on your customer's terms?
Most navigation structures are organized in ways that seem logical to the host's internal audience – by "products," "services," "solutions," etc. But if your prospect doesn't already know what your product or service names mean, ("What's a 'Data Integrity Analytic'?"), they're not likely to find what they need.

Hint: Guide your readers by using rubrics based on customer challenges, pains or desires, such as "Planning for Retirement" and "Reducing Taxes," for a financial planner, or perhaps, "Cold Climate Lawns" and "Low-Water Landscaping" for a garden site.

3) Are your offers easily accessible?
You have a terrific white paper or report that visitors can download from your website. But…they have to complete a ten-question registration form in order to get it. And the number of downloads are much lower than you had expected.

Hint: Yeah, I know you're trying to capture contact information as part of a lead generation effort. You might be better served, however, by getting your content into more hands, thereby impressing more potential customers with your expertise and initiating more relationships. Just two days ago, a client of mine said she had *tripled* the number of downloads for a particular white paper by removing the onerous registration form. You might want to try the same.

4) Is your content distributed properly?
I know I've said this before but it's worth saying again: Don't dump your testimonials, case studies and white papers into subsections with those labels. Why? Because you're

making your readers do the hard work of searching for content that should fall into their laps, instead.

Hint: Distribute your content on an individual basis to the most relevant pages. For example, put the great testimonial about the helpful representative on a "consultation" page, the case study about a successful interest rate analysis on a "services" page, and the white paper about sexual harassment on your "HR Litigation Support" page.

5) Do you offer print-friendly pages?
Many people, such as myself, don't do like to do any in-depth reading off a flickering monitor; we prefer to print those pages for easier reading -- and for sharing with others. But thanks to the "magic" of over-zealous designers, many pages are print nightmares with cut-off margins, odd page breaks and frustrating multi-page segregations of copy, illustrations and navigation devices.

Hint: Design your pages to be print-friendly. If they simply can't be, then do what so many online newspapers do – offer a print-friendly version visitors can click to and print out easily.

6) Is your contact information complete and easy to find?
We like to know that there are human beings behind the websites we visit. And that, when we have questions, there's a real person who can help us. Don't bury your contact information where it's difficult (or impossible) to find.

Hint: Consider putting your snail-mail address, primary e-mail address and phone number on the bottom of every page. That way they're not only easy to find, but will "stick" to any page a visitor might choose to print out.

7) Are you generous with your expertise?
The web is not an interrupting medium, like a TV commercial or a magazine ad. People come to our sites of their own free will, actively looking for something. The more you can satisfy that "something," the greater their good feelings toward you. That's why the "short copy" or "keep it above the fold" arguments are irrelevant.

Hint: Boasts and promises should indeed be kept short. But you should be generous with meaningful content, such as relevant news, how-to instructions, helpful guides, industry reports, etc. Don't be afraid of long copy – as long as the copy is genuinely relevant to your visitors' interests.

8) Does your home page have a place for timely announcements or news?
Your latest white paper. A great news hit. That new product announcement. Or your next seminar invitation. Why hide them within the thickets of your site? These should be readily visible to new and repeat visitors.

Hint: Create a special area on your home page where visitors can expect to find the latest important news – or new offers or new events -- from your company. It need not be long. One or two descriptive sentences with a hyperlink to further information will do the trick.

9) Do you have a retention device?

You put up great content and your visitors are loving it. Now that you've attracted them into your orbit, you need a way to keep them there. Your goal: To keep them within your sphere of influence.

Hint: Offer a subscription to a regular (I recommend monthly) e-newsletter. They're simple and inexpensive, and they're an easy way to keep your name and message on your prospects' radar screens.

10) Do you regularly check your web stats?

If not, how do you know what people are reading? You need to know which pages attract and hold visitors, and which are simply not working. With this info on hand, you know what to dump, what to pump, and which lines of messaging are connecting to customers.

Hint: Want to know if people are reading, or at least skimming, important pages? In the middle or bottom of a key page, place a hyperlink to a new page (perhaps with a testimonial or case study) that can't be accessed through any other link placed anywhere else. You might get a stray hit from a search engine know and again, but on the whole, any stats you track for the new page will give you a reasonably fair indication of how carefully your original source page is being read.

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