



Intelligent Internet Solutions

Eurisko Discussion Document
Content King of the Web

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Content - King of the Web

Content is now, and realistically always has been, 'King of the Web'. As use of the Internet has grown, people's expectations have increased exponentially. Today Google indexes over 8 billion web pages; with so much information available, so easily, to so many, it has never been more important that your website is not only up to date but also written and presented in such a manner as to make the identification and collation of information as quick and easy as possible for the sites users.

If your site does not make it easy for visitors to find the up to date information, product or service that they are looking for, then you risk them simply not bothering and going elsewhere, remember your competitors are only a mouse click away!

Website owners and managers often fail to appreciate that the presentation of both timely and well written web content improves the overall usability of a web site considerably. Gone are the days when usability was only associated with the underlying information architecture (structure) and the navigation of a website. Although still important, these elements cannot disguise poorly written, out of date content.

In a study carried out by John Morkes and Jakob Nielsen and published on useit.com, it was found that by writing content in a concise, easy to scan and objective style, overall usability was improved by 124%, over content written in the wordy marketing speak that is all too prevalent on the web today.

Give them what they want!

Having said that a concise writing style is essential for creating good web content, it is also equally important that visitors to your website have access to the depth of information that they require. This is critical if you are to enable them to make any sort of decision, no matter whether it is to make use of your services, buy a product, or simply utilise the information that you have supplied. A lack of essential detail will undermine the credibility and usefulness of anything that you publish.

So, how can these seemingly opposing needs be met? To understand and hence achieve what at first appearance seems to be an impossible balance, you need to consider a number of key criteria and adopt some basic rules:

1. Know your target audience
2. Distribute content authoring
3. Manage the flow of your information
4. Manage the quality of your information
5. Adopt a modular approach to content writing
6. Don't have out-of-date content

Know your target audience

Your target audience may vary from site section to section, but whether you have a single or, as is more common now, multiple target audiences, always ensure that the content is created with the specific needs of the

audience foremost. Marketers have different requirements to technical users, who have different requirements to key decision makers, so make sure that the site is both structured and written in such a way as to meet the different user type's needs and expectations.

Distribute content authoring to the experts

Empower the right people to manage your website's content. In today's markets, rarely can one person write all the content for your website. With the typical need for a combination of marketing, sales, financial and key service/product information being the 'norm' for a modern website, it is unrealistic to expect to have all the content created by a single source.

By distributing the ability to author, edit and publish content amongst the relevant experts within your company you are able to harness the combined knowledge and expertise of your company on your website – mirroring how a company works in the real world and creating an asset that has a greater value than the sum of its constituent parts.

Managing the flow and quality of your information

Empowering a distributed workforce to create, edit and publish content is one thing, but managing the flow and quality of that information is another all together. If you rely upon content created using a word processor or spreadsheet application you encounter a host of problems:

- Multiple documents being sent to a single point for editing and/or approval
- Content that is written out of context of its 'surroundings'
- Bottlenecks created by the quantity of documents and the differing formats
- A range of managerial issues around the editorial and approval processes
- The need for technical expertise to publish the finally approved content

How can you get around these issues whilst still empowering the right people for the job of creating and managing the content of your website? Enter the Web Content Management System.

There is no need or excuse for a modern corporate website to be created as a collection of static web pages and managed either by an in-house IT/web expert, or outsourced for content maintenance to a third party company. Both situations create an environment where there is an inbuilt reluctance to maintain the content and ensure the website reflects the latest information available to your website visitors; either due to the workload of the in-house staff or budgetary restraints restricting the amount of work that can be outsourced to an agency.

A Web Content Management System (WCMS) enables the entire content creation process, from authoring, through to editing and approval and finally onto publishing the finished content to the website, to be kept in-house, without the need for any technical expertise or expert knowledge.

Content can be created, edited, previewed, and approved in the same environment. All editing functions can be carried out using an interface

that is almost identical to a word processor, and the relevant approval processes (workflows) are built in, ensuring the right people see and approve the right content at the right time. The publication process is completed at the click of a button by the relevantly approved person. This end-to-end management enables the content writers to concentrate on the creation without having to worry about the rest of the process.

Adopt a modular approach to content writing

Writing for the web is not a black art; it is more the application of simple, logical rules that are specific to an environment where users have high expectations and short attention spans. By adopting a simple 3 step approach to web content writing the usability and the value of your web site will increase dramatically.

Concise

Don't pad any content out with 'marketing talk', as it has proven to be a major problem for the vast majority of web site users, irrelevant of experience, position or job type. Instead:

- Adopt a concise and modular style
- Use short clear sentences
- Use bulleted lists and tightly constructed paragraphs.

Modular

Create content in a modular format, whereby the first paragraph is in effect a summary of all the following paragraphs. This is often referred to as the inverted pyramid style of writing, as the conclusion is at the start as opposed to the end of the document. Each subsequent paragraph should then be both self contained (e.g. make sense when read in isolation or with just the initial paragraph) and an informative extension of the overview that was presented in the initial paragraph.

Provide related product/information links

By writing your content in this manner you are able to achieve the seemingly impossible of being both concise and detailed. By using the initial paragraph as the primary page and the subsequent paragraphs as linked pages or documents available to the user only if they are interested and require more information. The initial paragraph can therefore be looked upon as a highlighted headline pulling the user in to find out more, in much the same way as the news headlines do in newspapers and on the radio and television.

Don't have out-of-date content

Whether you have a small or a large site out of date content, although inexcusable, is in reality difficult to control, unless you use a WCMS. A web content management system will enable you to undertake and manage two core requirements essential to content currency:

- The expiration and removal of content that should no longer be available to your web site users
- The ability to prepare time sensitive content, such as news releases, job vacancies, financial reports etc., ahead of time and have it automatically published come the pre-defined date and time.

Both the publication and expiry of time sensitive information should be able to be undertaken without manual intervention ensuring a more current website with a reduced risk of human error.

Conclusion

Web content and its creation requires different disciplines to offline content. The average website user has high expectations and is 'time poor'. Consequently website content has to be written and presented in such a way as to meet both these requirements. Additionally website users expect to be able to find out all they need to know from a site, and this at first appearance is at odds with the requirement for short, concise writing.

However, by making use of a good web content management system (WCMS) and creating content in a modular fashion, all the core requirements of the discerning website user can be met. The end result is a website that not only serves your users better but that also meets the more and more difficult to obtain business objectives that are essential in this digital age.

About Eurisko Consulting Services

Eurisko are a web design and development consultancy that specialise in delivering intelligent internet solutions that help you to connect with people. Relationships are at the heart of what we do and how we work with our clients.

- We listen to your needs and what you're trying to achieve
- We strive to understand your business, your culture and how you work with your customers, partners and channel
- We work collaboratively with you to design and implement the right solution for you and your business

Solutions

Our solutions are based around intelligence, manageability and usability. They include:

- Public web site consultancy, design and development
- Content management solutions
- Web 2.0 consultancy and development – communities and user created content
- Secure extranets - for clients, partners, channel sales and members
- Corporate and departmental intranets
- Collaborative document management solutions

Benefits to your Business from working with Eurisko

- Relationship-based approach to technology-based solutions
- Cross-industry expertise enables cross-fertilisation of ideas
- Solutions tailored to meet business objectives and fit the way your business works
- Collaborative partnership: Eurisko works as an integral part of your organisation
- Services that encompass the entire project lifecycle
- Deep technical understanding enables precise solution tailoring

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