Fresh

Active

Concise

Evocative

The F.A.C.E of Writing for the Web

A White Paper by

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Just having a presence on the Web does not mean the public will visit and keep visiting. Your Web presence needs to be worth remembering. Web visitors expect frequent updates, easily navigable sites, easy-to-ready content, and most of all, they want interesting information that makes them think. This is where F.A.C.E. comes in.

Successful Web sites have the following four elements in common:

- **F**resh content, updated at least monthly, if not weekly or daily
- **A**ctive, interactive pages
- **C**oncise, compelling content
- **E**vocative content that provokes thought or action

This paper discusses the four-step F.A.C.E. process in detail, and will show that by following these steps, your site will stand out in the Web crowd.

Why F.A.C.E.?

"Content is critical. Increasingly, it is the lifeblood that runs through the veins of the information economy. You'd better get good at it."

~ Gerry McGovern, No Silver Bullet for Web Content

According to a March 2006 Web server survey conducted by Netcraft, there are more than 77.5 million Web sites on the World Wide Web. Web sites exist for nearly every imaginable topic, and some that defy imagination. There could be dozens or even hundreds of sites to choose from that address the same topics you do. But how many of those Web sites have regular visitors? How many of those do Web surfers think are worth visiting on a consistent basis?

F.A.C.E. it - you need visitors

For many businesses, as well as organizations such as non-profits and universities, having a Web site worth visiting frequently is not a luxury, but a necessity. The Internet is one of the most innovative ways to communicate with consumers. Web sites are easy and relatively inexpensive to create, allowing for quick communication with the public.

However, a Web site needs to have what visitors want. Content is the reason someone visits a Web site. Interesting content, or lack thereof, will be the deciding factor in whether or not you have repeat visitors. By applying the four F.A.C.E. steps, you can get visitors in to your site and keep them coming back.

Fresh

"On the Web, nothing looks as bad as cobwebs."

~ Jonathan and Lisa Price, Hot Text

Getting visitors to visit your Web site is one thing. Getting visitors to come back is another.

New content equals repeat visitors

If you do not have something new for visitors to read, why should they come back? Presenting new content on a regular basis is one of the best ways to earn credibility on the Web. No new content equals no credibility, and therefore, no repeat visitors. Content should be updated on a monthly basis, at the very least. Weekly, or even daily, updates are more desirable.

Hear ye, hear ye

Having fresh content is only half of the equation. The other half is making sure visitors can find that new content. Announce your updates by creating links or sections such as "What's New" or "Announcements". Make it easy for visitors to find updated or new information. Link to new information with wording that makes it interesting. A link announcing, "ASU Breaks Ground on Fifth Campus" will pique a reader's interest more than "News Release".

Active

"The Web is about links and connections. Never leave your reader at a dead-end on your Web site."

~ Gerry McGovern, 10 Rules of Writing for the Web

Web surfers have choices. They like having choices about what and how much to read on a topic.

Be a tease

Give the reader a teaser; a headline and one- or two-sentence synopsis of the content with a link to the rest. This invites the reader to click inside if interested. If readers are not interested, they go on to the next teaser. News Web sites such as AZCentral.com are especially adept at giving a "sound bite" of information on an article, then providing a link to the rest of the story.

No one-way streets

If a visitor does click into a link for more information, make sure they can get back out without having to use the "Back" button on their browser. Menus should be prominently displayed, usually along the left or top of the page. If the page is long, offering a "Back to [Previous Page's Name]" link at the end of the page is a good way to keep visitors from having to scroll up to the menu.

Links are not just for menus

Another way to place links is directly into the narrative. Links should not be disruptive; they should flow within the context of the narrative. Using "For information on the two weight rooms in the Physical Activity Center, click here" creates a hiccup for the reader. "The Physical Activity Center has two weight rooms" keeps the flow of the text while providing a link for more information.

Avoid getting too link-happy

Because they can be distracting, keep links within text to a minimum. Having a sentence with nearly every word underlined as a link will distract the reader to the point of annoyance. The "Writing for the Web" article produced by Dartmouth College lists the misuse of links as one of the most common mistakes made by Web authors. Because of this, it is best to err on the side of "less is more" when it comes to links. Make sure that what you are making a link, and therefore making a new destination, is worth that distinction.

Concise

> "Every word and phrase should fight for its life."
>
> ~ *Crawford Kilian*, Effective Web Writing

Countless usability studies have determined one thing that nearly all Internet audiences have in common: Web readers are scanners.

Write to scan

According to Web usability guru Jakob Nielsen, only 16 percent of site visitors read every word on a page. Nielsen also writes that reading from computer screens is about 25% slower than reading from paper. What does this mean? Readers want as much information as possible in as few words as possible.

Get chunky

One of the most effective ways to present text on a Web page is through "chunking." Crawford Kilian, author of *Writing for the Web: Geeks' Edition*, describes chunking as stand-alone blocks of text that contain 100 words or less per paragraph. Each chunk generally is limited to one idea or topic. By presenting text in digestible chunks and providing links to additional content, readers can quickly find the information they want and will have the option to read more.

Make a list, check it twice

Another effective way to present content is through lists. Bulleted and numbered lists:

- are easier to scan,
- are more visually appealing to readers,
- make the text stand out, and
- are normally more succinct.

In general, numbered lists are used to show steps that must go in a specific order. For instance:

1. Study the F.A.C.E. process
2. Rework your Web site using F.A.C.E.
3. Watch the visitors pour in

Evocative

> *"Your site needs to welcome action by your visitors, even provoke it."*
>
> *Crawford Kilian*, Effective Web Writing

Web surfers visit sites to accomplish something, whether it is to do research or buy a product. Your content should be written in the best possible way to facilitate that action.

Move visitors to action

Web content management consultant and author Gerry McGovern writes, "Every sentence should be moving them [visitors] toward a purchase, a subscription, a solution." If you want visitors to subscribe to an e-newsletter, advertise it in a way that makes visitors think it is in their best interest to do so. Text such as "Click here to subscribe to our e-newsletter" is not provocative. "Get tips, expert articles and more in our free e-newsletter" shows the reader how they will benefit from subscribing.

News Web sites are good at evoking action from their readers. Most stories on their front pages are presented as an enticing headline, along with one or two sentences -- usually a synopsis of the lead paragraph of the story -- then a link providing the entire story. Those headlines have to be interesting. You will never see a headline like "Sony Issues Press Release on PS3" on CNN.com; you will see something like "Sony's PS3 Game Console Delayed". The same holds true for any links, not just headlines. Be descriptive; make visitors want to click on that link.

Provoke discussion

Feedback and/or comment areas on your Web site are a great way to find out what your visitors are thinking. By providing a comment option, your content can provoke discussion among your visitors. Some will come back on a regular basis to keep the conversation going, and some will keep visiting to see what others have said.

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