

Creating Content & Writing for the Web: A Seminar

Session Two

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Welcome!

- Introductions
- Overview of our first session:
 - Format, form, and substance: how these inform content and interact
 - Studies about reading online and electronically: eyetracking studies from the Poynter Institute, studies by usability “guru” Jakob Nielsen and his Nielsen Norman Group, Maryanne Wolfe’s exploration of reading in Proust and the Squid (she is a researcher from Tufts), and others
 - The F scanning pattern that most readers use online: <http://www.nngroup.com/articles/f-shaped-pattern-reading-web-content/>
- Best Practices based on research and usability findings
- Challenges **
- Our Projects

Today's Session

- Short discussion of curation versus creation (5-10 minutes)
- Best Practices:
 - Develop a Core Content Strategy (Brain Traffic)
 - Writing the Content Your Audience Needs so that they will Use It!
 - Maintaining your content
 - Writing tips, tricks, and tools
 - Killing your darlings
- Using storyboarding and wire-framing to support best practices

F Pattern Description

“Heatmaps from user eyetracking studies of three websites. The areas where users looked the most are colored red; the yellow areas indicate fewer views, followed by the least-viewed blue areas. Gray areas didn't attract any fixations.

- The above heatmaps show how users read three different types of Web pages:
- an article in the ["about us" section of a corporate website \(far left\)](#),
- a [product page on an e-commerce site \(center\)](#), and
- a search engine results page (SERP; far right).”

From Nielsen Norman Group

Curation versus Creation

- Curation is trending (Pinterest, Tumblr, some of the ways Twitter can be used, LibraryThing, others...)
- But how does this trend relate to what we do?
 - Pinterest is becoming an important discovery tool for image-based content
- How does content curation relate to your work?
- Our focus here is primarily on creation but it is important to consider how our content creation enables (and encourages) its curation

Content Development & Best Practices

- Develop a “core content strategy”



CONTENT COMPONENTS

PEOPLE COMPONENTS

Content Development & Best Practices (Cont)

- Resources: Usability.Gov, Brain Traffic, WebAIM.org (Web Accessibility in Mind), howto.gov/web-content, and the University of Chicago
- Auditing and Planning your content:
 - Content audit and analysis: Identify the Content that you have (this could be published or unpublished content)
 - Understand your audience: who is your audience, what is the message you're trying to convey, what do you want your users to do, what keywords will your users use to find your content (use these to generate/draft your content), how does the content fit into your overall organizational strategy

Content Development & Best Practices (Cont)

- Analyze the Content you identify: Gauge its effectiveness, relevancy, and currency
- Identify your Content Goals, priorities, organizing principles/ architecture (both overall and within your pages or articles/ blog posts), the tools you have to produce the content*, and the human resources needed to create and maintain your content and how to engage those resources in the content creation cycle.
- Create a content creation and maintenance cycle
- Identify the content that you, and especially your users, need: define your audience(s), think about personas (would having user personas help you make your content more effective?)
- Academic organizations across the board find developing a content strategy to be the most challenging part of creating online content and therefore have trouble managing that content once it's out there: XKCD Comic!
- But the strategy is the key to great and engaging content

Content Development & Best Practices (Cont)

Writing for the Web

- CLEAR, CONCISE, SCANNABLE, and DIRECT
- Depending on audience and type of content, it should also be objective and authoritative *
- Generally bad to use all caps!
- Use your audience-generated keywords to create a great Page or Article/Post Title and the subheadings that will “chunk” your content and make it more scannable
- Left justify, “ragged-right” content is easiest to read
- Line length is important

Content Development & Best Practices (Cont)

- Put your most important information at the top of the page
- Use subheadings, bulleted lists, anchors, and embedded links (created using meaningful text rather than Click Here) to break up your content
- Sentences should be short and to the point
- Even at Columbia, and perhaps especially so, content will be read by ESL researchers and students who may use translation software: create clear sentences using a simple structure to enable ease of scanning and ease of translation.
- Subject verb object. If you need adverbs, think about whether you've chosen the correct verb
- Avoid Jargon!*

Content Development & Best Practices (Cont)

- As NYU so wisely says: “Be Brief and Direct ... But Not Too Brief”
 - A page should have at least one paragraph of content
 - Create independent content
 - Headlines and copy that stand on their own
 - Think of how you move through the web (your audience probably moves through it in much the same way and it is not the same linear process that is the norm in print. Skip around, more similar to a newspaper)

We have established that writing for the web is not the same as writing for a print publication.