



6 Fatal Mistakes Businesses Make When Developing and Writing Web Content

...And How You Can Avoid Them

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Introduction

I'm writing this with the assumption that you already know and agree that the web is an excellent medium to showcase your products and services. It lets you reach buyers from every corner of the globe, and makes information accessible 24/7/365.

But when developing your content, keep in mind that the web is an intimate medium. Many companies use the web only to replicate their corporate brochure. But I say, use today's interactive technology for all that it's worth by letting your web do more of your work for you, and let it help you build a relationship with potential customers the minute they walk in your virtual door.

And as with any other collateral, appearances count. If your potential customers' first impression of you is a shoddy website, replete with grammatical and spelling errors, and unprofessional copy, chances are you've lost that sale. To me, even one lost customer due to correctable errors is a fatal, and dreadful mistake.

If you're going to spend time, money and energy to establish your company on the web, I say, do it right the first time around.

Why take the chance of losing even one potential customer?

Not all of the mistakes that follow deal with grammar and spelling, but as a writer, and as a reader, and a consumer of both business and mass market products and services, I think it's one of the worst mistakes you can make. If you're serving an educated audience, they'll pick up on bad writing (which may be forgivable), and worse, poor grammar (not forgivable), faster than you can say, "Click here."



Mistake #1 – Not Infusing Your Text with Keywords

Hopefully you know about keywords, and how search engine spiders rank your site based on the quantity of keywords you use in your copy, as well as how and where you use them.

If not, please visit www.selfpromotion.com. The guy who put this site together is a technical whiz, and while I don't know him personally (or even professionally), he knows what he's doing when it comes to search engine marketing.

Let's take one of my customer's sites as an example. They're at www.swishmail.com. Swishmail provides email and web hosting for individuals and businesses here in the U.S., as well as internationally. They host both large corporate and small business sites, like mine.

If you're looking for someone to host your website, you, like more than 80% of Internet users, start your journey at a search engine. Maybe you use Google. Or Yahoo! Or AOL or MSN. In any case, you type the words and phrases you're searching for into the search box, and the engine pulls up relevant pages for you to review.

Sometimes, it pulls up millions of pages.

For example, when I enter "email hosting" into Google's search box, it gives me 97,700 results.

If you're an email-hosting provider, you certainly don't want your site to be listed among the last thousand results. Or even the last 90,000 results. Or even the last 97,600 results.

Why? Because no one, I mean no one, is going to click through to that many websites in their search for an email-hosting provider.

In fact, studies show that most people stop looking through results after the first three pages. That means that if your site isn't listed among the first 30 results (10 results per page for three pages), it most likely won't be found.

At this writing, I see that Swishmail is listed on the first page of results, the seventh provider down.

How did they get there?

Well keywords are not all that matters, especially on Google, which also ranks your site based on how many other sites link to your domain, and whether you use keywords in your titles and headers, etc. Check with www.selfpromotion.com for articles on how to get ranked as high as possible.

But keywords do play an important part of garnering a top-notch ranking like Swishmail's. Now look at their homepage copy (which, by the way, I wrote):

Do you rely on business email for vital business communications?

Then rely on email hosting from Swishmail, the leader in business email hosting services. Since we find email hosting problems before they find us, you'll not only get your business email quickly, but reliably. We're also a secure email provider—viruses won't get in, and your confidential information won't get out. Count on superior support, too. Swishmail's an email provider that takes your email hosting seriously. You'll get knowledgeable business email support right when you need it—so you can get back to business.

Notice how many keywords are seamlessly integrated into that one, brief paragraph:

- Email hosting, four times
- Business communications, once
- Business email, four times
- Email provider, twice

That's why you should incorporate keywords into the body of your web content, and avoid the mistake that the other 97,670 email providers made.

Mistake #2 – Focusing on Features and Ignoring Benefits

If you know anything about direct response writing, you know that benefits, not features, sell.

And if you don't know anything about direct response writing, now's the time to learn—before you create your website copy.

It doesn't matter if you're an international forensic accounting investigations firm with offices around the world, a consultant serving high-tech manufacturers, a global business development firm, or a local accountant, attorney or mom-and-pop retailer looking to grow your business online.

No matter what you provide, no matter what you sell, you can find the benefits associated with your offer, and communicate them clearly to your target audience.

For example, one of my clients is a local accountant, who wanted to begin developing a relationship with potential customers the minute they visited her site. So not only did I create unique copy (for an accountant!), but also, I helped her



communicate the benefits of her services. (If you're interested, you can view her site at www.brendadriggercpa.com.)

After all, people don't hire an accountant for monthly financial reports. Or for a tax return. Yes, those are features of her services, but let's take a look at the benefits:

We'll help you understand the numbers, and point you in new directions that will save you time, and money.

- Is your bottom line too low? Let us show you proven ways to increase productivity and enhance efficiency.
- Is your tax bill too high? We know the rules, and will show you ways to reduce your payment to Uncle Sam.
- Are your records a mess? We'll help you fix them, and tell you how to get and stay on the right track.

See the difference? People want an accountant to help them make more money. To help them keep more money in their own pockets by giving less to Uncle Sam. And also, to help them organize messy bookkeeping. Of course there are other benefits, but we focused on what is most important to the majority of the clients she serves.

If you need help uncovering the benefits of your service, try drawing a two-column table. On the left side, list the features of your services. And on the right side, list what your customers GET from those features.

For example:

FEATURES (What You Provide)	BENEFITS (What They GET from What You Provide)
Professional Web Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ More Customers ▪ More Income ▪ Better Company Image



Ghostwritten Articles

- Free Publicity
- Showcase your expertise to people who may need your services
- More Customers
- More Income
- Name Recognition

Discover the benefits of your services, and communicate those benefits in your web copy to avoid another common fatal website mistake.

Mistake #3 – Writing in Corporate-ese

This is a very common mistake. Web sites written in corporate mumbo-jumbo literally proliferate the web today, whether they're sites produced by corporate America, or the mom-and-pop bookstore in your local neighborhood. And it's surprising to me, considering how many articles are out there about the benefits of having easy to read, conversational web content.

The best way to describe corporate-ese it is to show you an example. (I'm stealing the following content from another of my reports on Fatal Mistakes Businesses Make When Producing a Company Brochure, because the concept is the same, and because this type of copy is everywhere on the web.)

I've changed the company's name to save myself from possible legal action, and to save the company from embarrassment:

Incorporated nearly 40 years ago, XYZ is one of the longest established, independent, privately owned (xyz) companies. XYZ offers a comprehensive portfolio of services designed to protect and enhance today's international business community. The company has built a reputation based on the delivery of a high quality service which is discreet, thorough and extremely successful.

XZY act for some of the most pre-eminent companies in the world and operates on every continent. When working with clients a very close relationship is maintained which ensures the best understanding of their particular requirements.

I kid you not. Those two paragraphs are taken directly from a corporate brochure sitting right here in front of me. Grammar and punctuation mistakes included



(XYZ acts, not act. Can you find the punctuation error? Don't worry—it's my job to catch problems like that anyway).

Did reading their material make you want to jump up and call them right away?

Let's dissect their prose, so you can avoid making the same fatal mistake in your writing—whether it's for your website, or a corporate brochure.

First problem: Using the passive voice. I'm not going to explain grammar rules here, but I'm going to show you how big a difference the active voice makes.

Passive sentence: *When working with clients, a very close relationship is maintained....*

Let's change it to the active voice, which is much livelier, and see what happens:

We maintain a very close relationship when working with clients....

Read through your copy. Whenever you see "is verbed," chances are you can rewrite the sentence for a better sound and flow.

Second problem: Writing as if they're telling a disinterested party what they do, rather than telling a potential customer. How to correct it? Write directly TO the customer.

Instead of: *We maintain a very close relationship with clients which ensures the best understanding of their particular requirements,*

Say, *We maintain a very close relationship with you, which ensures that we understand your particular requirements.*

Write your copy as if you're talking person to person. Make it conversational rather than a treatise. After all, if they decide to email you, or to purchase your projects, they'll be doing with a real human being (unless you're a mass market catalog provider...).

Third problem: Talking about the company in the third person. If you resolve the previous two problems, you'll naturally resolve this one.

Instead of: *The company has built a reputation based on the delivery of a high quality service which is discreet, thorough and extremely successful,*

Say: *We have built a reputation....*

Fourth problem: Writing with over-used words and phrases that mean nothing, and that no one believes.

Instead of: *...the delivery of a high quality service,*

Define what you mean by high quality. The phrase is ubiquitous, and since everyone says it, no one believes it.



For example, perhaps high quality means that your reports are 99.7% accurate, and that you return all phone calls within two hours. Or, perhaps in your industry, high quality means error-free. Be specific. If you want to say you provide a high quality product or service, by all means do so. But tell your prospects what you mean by high quality.

And in doing so, your web site will stand out from your competitors', leave your readers with the feeling that a real person is talking, build trust and establish a relationship right from the start, help you truly communicate to your customers, and avoid another fatal mistake.

Mistake #4 – No Contact Information, or About Us Page

This shocks me too. Because the web is so personal and intimate, and because we have to strive to let potential clients and customers know that we're real people out here behind the web site, and that we're not going to take their money and run, we should do all that we can to alleviate any fears of the unknown by telling our customers about us. And, by letting them reach us by conventional means.

Perhaps your next potential client is not email savvy. Suppose they have a question, and want to call you in person. What do they do if your phone number's not there?

Why make it hard on them to do business with you? Why take the chance that they'll take the time to drag out the phone book, or call information, to find your phone number?

And say you're selling products online. Why not allow your customers to send a check through the mail, or to fax or call in their credit card number if they're still apprehensive of doing business online?

Case in point.

One of my customers sells a specialized medical product online, but he lives outside of the U.S. so he doesn't include contact information, or allow for any means of payment other than by credit card online.

Now for a time, I was answering his customer emails...many of which asked, "Can I send you a check?"

And I had to reply, every time, "Sorry, no checks accepted."

Guess what? He lost every one of those sales.

Now that's not his fault because he lives outside the U.S., and accepting checks from U.S. customers is a costly proposition. But it does go to show you that many people are still uncomfortable paying for purchases online.



So make it easy for your customers to reach you. Write up a brief About Us page to let them know you're a real person. Ease their fears about doing business with you. Give them as many ways to contact you, and to pay you as possible.

And avoid another fatal business mistake.

Mistake #5 – Not Asking For a Response

I'll keep this brief.

It's been proven time and time again, that in order to get prospects to do something, you have to ask them to do it.

What do you want them to do when they've finished reading your well-written and keyword-rich home page? Do you want them to click on your services link to learn more about what you do? Or to click on your About Us page so they can develop confidence in the fact that you're a real person, with the necessary expertise to help solve their problems?

Then ask them.

Say, "Click here to learn more about us."

And when they're presented with your offer, whether it's for a product or service, go ahead, ask them to buy. Say, "Click here to order now."

Do you want them to call or email you to request a quote? Tell them so.

Help guide them through your particular sales process.

For example, one of my clients is a consulting firm serving the high-tech industry. Their website fits into the sales process like this:

1. Phone call to or from a potential client, during which they are directed to the web for more details and information.
2. Potential client visits the web site, learns in detail about the services they offer (and they benefits they'll get if they engage the company to help), at which point they are directed to download a request for engagement.
3. Potential client becomes a client by completing request for engagement.

Now in your case, your website may serve as the first step in your customer's buying process, and in your sales process.

So your customer finds your website by searching on Google. (After all, you've read this report and your pages are well written and keyword-rich.) What do you want them to do next?



Tell your customers what to do, and if they feel that they can trust you, and that you have the expertise they need to solve their problems, they'll do whatever you ask.

Avoid the mistake of being an "online brochure," describing your products or services without asking for action.

Mistake #6 – Enduring an Unprofessional Design

No, this has nothing to do with content, but it's so important that I wanted to include it.

Quoted from Gerry McGovern's article entitled, "How Important is The Look and Feel of Your Website:"

A recent Stanford University study found that looks count when people judge a website for credibility.

"To look good is to be good--that's the primary test when people assess a Web site's credibility," said B.J. Fogg, Ph.D, who led the Stanford study. "People evaluate TV news and politicians in the same way: presentation matters more than substance. Why should we expect the Web to be any different?"

Another study, which focused on health and finance websites, had similar results. Conducted by Sliced Bread Design, it asked a group of experts and ordinary consumers to evaluate websites. 41.8 percent of consumers noted design when evaluating the websites, while only 7.6 percent of experts did the same.

McGovern's article ends with saying that content is king, and is really more important than design. If you'd like, read the entire piece here:

<http://www.marketingprofs.com/3/mcgovern3.asp>

But I'm telling you that the look of your site does matter. If you're searching for something—anything—online, and you're presented with two identical service providers, one with an amateurish design and one with a professional look, I almost guarantee you'll choose the more professional looking provider.

Right or wrong, I judge people by the looks of their site everyday. When a client asks for a web content quote, saying they want to spend between \$500 and \$1,500 to develop professional copy, and I look at their site and see something that looks like my neighbor did it, I tell them to get less copy to start, and pay for a professional design.



Then, after they've realized more profits, we can enhance and expand on the content.

In my opinion, it's that important.

So pay attention to the look of your site, and avoid another fatal web mistake.

Conclusion

Unfortunately, there are many more than 7 fatal mistakes you can make when developing your web site and content.

But by following the guidelines presented above, you'll be well on your way to an inviting, relevant and readable website that moves people to action, outshines your competitors', and brings you quality leads and more business.

If you'd like help developing professional and keyword-rich content for your business website, please get in touch today. And if you need a turnkey solution, you'll be pleased to note that I've developed working relationships with several experts, including skilled graphic designers and web developers.

You may call me at 727-302-0232, Monday – Friday, from 9:00 am until 4:00 pm, Eastern Standard Time.

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