GET IN THE GAME:

5 BEST PRACTICES TO IMPROVE YOUR MOBILE WRITING

MOBILE USE IS ON THE RISE. In fact, predictors indicate that by 2014, more people will access digital content with a mobile device than with a traditional, desktop computer. If you are in a professional marketing role, you need to get serious about your mobile content strategy.

Google's Zero Moment of Truth makes your mobile content strategy even more important. According to their research, the average user needs to **digest 10 pieces of content** before making a purchasing decision. This means your mobile content needs to be well written, findable and appealing. Create the future for your organization because sooner or later, you will need your own digital content playbook.

Luckily, this doesn't require hard labor. What it does require is research, analysis of your needs, strategic planning and clear vision.

Even the Federal Government created a 12-month mobile roadmap for agencies.

So it's time for *you* to get into the mobile game.

The Foundation of All Great Digital Writing

Marketplaces are conversations, and nowhere do we see this more clearly than on the Web. Ginny Redish, who wrote the seminal text on Web writing, *Letting Go of the Words*, explains, "Every communication is a conversation mediated by technology."

When you're sitting at your desk, in the comfort of your home or office, you're engaged in one kind of conversation on your large screen. A mobile device, with a smaller screen size and the ability to manipulate the screen by touch, enables a completely different type of conversation.

No matter what type of content you create—mobile, traditional Web or print—you always begin the content creation process by thinking about your reader. If the technology is mediating the conversation, respect that conversation. Think of the way you talk on the telephone versus the language and grammar you use when you text. The technology changes the nature, tone and sometimes the subject matter exchanged.

Writing for Mobile: 5 best practices

If you're responsible for digital content, you need to know how to take advantage of the mobile marketplace. At *Aha Media Group*, we've developed five best practices that serve as excellent guidelines for writing strong mobile content.

1. Decide the content priorities

2. Visualize your content's container

3. Follow the rules for reader comprehension

4. Pay careful attention to your prompts, headlines and calls to action

5. Research your mobile long tail keywords

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1. Decide the content priorities

Start with your readers. What do they want to know in that moment as they access your content on their mobile device? Think about a hospital's website. Do mobile users really care about the history of the hospital when they're looking up a doctor? Do they want to read about your latest blood drive?

Probably not. They are looking for the essentials—locations, hours, physicians, contact information. Consider putting all of those essentials at the top of a mobile page. Add in pre-programmed tasks, so if they select the phone number, the phone prompts them to make the call.

Think through other types of content, like photographs. Photos drive a tremendous amount of traffic, but they will increase your page loading time. On a mobile device, when time is often of the essence, efficient page loading is the difference between business and no business. Plus, because photos eat up so much room on a small screen, they could affect your readers' comprehension of the content. Instead, think about putting photographs on a secondary page, so users can choose to jump to see them.

If you are selling a product that consumers want to see, then by all means, include photographs on the page.

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2. Visualize your content's container

This is something we teach in our digital writing workshops**, and it's a skill that's even more important for mobile.** Some digital writers write their content in a WYSIWYG (what you see is what you get) editor, so they can see on the fly how content displays. You may not have that functionality for your mobile site yet.

In a study cited by Jakob Nielsen, noted usability expert, smaller screens affect comprehension because:

- Users see less of the content at any given time
- They need to keep moving the page to see the totality of the material

In order to keep your content tight and focused, create a design template so you can preview your content on various mobile devices, including an iPhone, Droid, Blackberry and iPad. Using those templates while writing is invaluable, as you will see your content the same way your readers will, in tight spaces with small font. It will force you to minimize the amount of words you use.

3. Follow the rules for reader comprehension

People's comprehension drops off a cliff when you use more than:

- Two sentences per paragraph
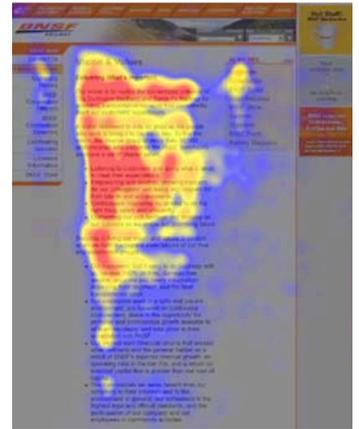
- 14 words per sentence

- Three syllables per word

Keep your sentences tight, short and in the active voice. Use line breaks often. Respect the inverted pyramid, which is how people scan text on any device.

People scan digital content in the shape of an inverted pyramid, which is an effective writing style for communicating important information at the top.

If you're an accomplished digital writer, you should be applying these writing guidelines to all of your content. When you use this type of writing in a mobile situation, you are respecting the very short, terse conversation you are having with your customer.

4. Pay careful attention to your prompts, headlines and calls to action

Prompts are linguistic cues. Examples include, "Map your directions," "See store hours and locations" and "Contact us." On a mobile device, every jump (or link) counts, because of bandwidth and speed. If you prompt incorrectly, your users will bounce off your site harder than three-year olds on a trampoline.

Headlines are vital. Write headlines that spark unbearable curiosity about what lies on the other side of the jump. Ensure the language makes sense to readers and search engines.

Increasingly, people want to read content without complicated sidebars and flashing ads in the right rail. In the world of mobile, there's no room for such distractions. Make sure your call to action is central in the text—don't use buttons or complicated forms. And don't be afraid to repeat that call to action later down the page.

5. Research your mobile long tail keywords

Users are thinking about a galaxy of things in a mobile environment. Yes, they are playing Words with Friends and checking their Facebook feeds, but if they're hunting information, their context around language is changing.

For example, I say, "Think of a mouse." Now I say, "Think of a mouse on your desk." Then I cue with, "Think of a mouse on your desk eating cheese."

Did the pictures in your head change as I added description? Similarly, users' language contexts are shifting rapidly in a mobile environment. They are satisfied with less information and the first link on their search pages. Research and use very specific location-based keywords.

Conclusion

There are many important considerations to juggle when thinking about your mobile strategy. These best practices will guide you as develop your mobile content. Equally important are the design and technical platform you are using. Google's recommended configuration is responsive design, but you may have a compelling reason to have a separate mobile site.

Like anything else in the digital strategy world, getting good at writing for mobile takes strategic thinking, practice and a willingness to iterate.

If you need help thinking about or creating your mobile strategy, we're here to help. Contact Ahava Leibtag at ahava@ahamediagroup.com or 301-452-5331.