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Writing for
the Web

Jack Powers
Director, Graphics Research Laboratory
Publisher,   www.electric-pages.com

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Writing for the Web

- **The Reading Environment**
- **Writing for the Screen**
- **Web Copy Guidelines**

Reference:
- www.electric-pages.com/notes/n 1.htm

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Three Kinds of Publishing

- **Information**
  - News, features, non-fiction
- **Entertainment**
  - Literature, storytelling, fiction
- **Persuasion**
  - Advertising, direct response

The Reading Environment

Surfer's Paradise

- **5 million pages, so little time**
- **Bullets, not paragraphs**
- **Pictures, not text**
- **Stories, not spiels**
- **And the reader is paying 5¢ per minute**

The Reading Environment

A Page-less Paradise

- **No three dimensional anchors**
  - a book, the chapter, a feature article
  - a finite page with heads, feet, folios
- **We can't look ahead.**
- **We can't browse the structure.**

The Reading Environment

Audience Demographics

- **Young, Affluent, Urban**
- **Media Rich**
- **Time Poor**
- **Usually non-literary**

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Writing for the Screen

- **"Re-purposing" text**
  - Text archives, Adobe Acrobat pages
  - Shoveling content
- **Adapting print content**
- **Writing fresh for the web**

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Six Advantages of New Media

- **Customization**
- **Timeliness**
- **Comprehensiveness**
- **Searchability**
- **Economy**
- **Transaction/Participation**

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Participation Examples

- **ALAMO RENT-A-CAR**
  - http://www.freeways.com
- **STOLICHNAYA**
  - http://www.stoli.com/

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The Structure of the Text

- **Didactic structure**
  - heads, subheads, links
- **Short sentences and paragraphs**
  - to the point
  - information or entertainment rich
- **Hyperlink threads**

Writing for the Screen

Take Charge of the Experience

- **First screenfull sets the tone**
- **Readers want control but need direction.**
- **If you lose them mid-paragraph, it's your own fault.**

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Information

- **Journalistic style: who, what, where, when, why**
- **Comprehensiveness/searchability**
  - Full-text searching
  - Fielded databases
  - Thesaurus and "concept" seaching
- **Database "Inference Engines"**

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Information Example

- **HOT WIRED**
  - http://www.hotwired.com/

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Entertainment

- **Text PLUS...**
  images and multimedia
  timeliness
  participation
  customization
- **Not narrative, transactional**

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Entertainment Example

- **ZIMA**
  - http://www.zima.com/

Persuasive Copy

Persuasion

- **Tempting the Click**
- **Creating prospect incentives**
  - Demonstrations and product-related info
  - Price discounts, coupons
  - Editorial/games environment
- **Direct response orientation**
- **Video game design skills**

Persuasive Copy

Product Pitches

- **Marketing communications**
  - Features, functions and updates
- **Product-based features**
  - Demonstrations
- **Product-based games**
  - Mazes, quizzes, skill games

Persuasive Copy

Discounting and Couponing

- **Price pitch**
- **Response modality**
  - Preferably web-based
- **Capturing the names and demographics**

Persuasive Copy

Compelling Editorial

- **Entertainment copy**
  - images and multimedia
  - timeliness
  - participation
  - customization
- **Game orientation**
- **Bulletin board**

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Web Copy Guidelines

- **Structuring the text**
- **Crafting the language**
- **Creating a clean narrative path**

Web Copy Guidelines

Structuring the Text

- **Write to an outline**
  - "The three main issues/products/people..."
  - "Last year x, this year y, next year z."
- **Show the outline to the reader**
  - TOCs, running heads, icons
- **Accommodate multi-level readers**
- **Use intra-line links like footnotes**

Web Copy Guidelines

Crafting the Language

- **Keep lines and paragraphs short**
- **Be careful with jargon, acronyms**
- **Write in the active voice**
- **Hyperlink the $20 words, concepts**

Web Copy Guidelines

A Clean Narrative Path

- **Describe the buttons and links**
  - Avoid GIF guessing games
- **Every "click here" is a failure of language**
- **Guide the reader forward, backward and linkward**

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For more information see
ELECTRIC PAGES
http://www.electric-pages.com

GRAPHICS RESEARCH LABORATORY
405 Fourth Street, Brooklyn NY 11215
GRLab@aol.com
718-499-1884 • FAX 718-499-1970