Writing for the Web

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Writing for the Web

The Reading Environment

Surfer's Paradise

Three Kinds of Publishing

A Page-less Paradise

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

• The Reading Environment
• Writing for the Screen
• Web Copy Guidelines

Reference:
• www.electric-pages.com/notes/n1.htm

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

• 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

**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

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

Writing for the Screen

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

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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Writing for the Web

Information
• Journalistic style: who, what, where, when, why
• Comprehensiveness/searchability
  - Full-text searching
  - Fielded databases
  - Thesaurus and “concept” searching
• Database “Inference Engines”

Information Example
• HOT WIRED
  - http://www.hotwired.com/

Writing for the Screen

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

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

Product Pitches
• Marketing communications
  - Features, functions and updates
• Product-based features
  - Demonstrations
• Product-based games
  - Mazes, quizzes, skill games
Discounting and Couponing

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

Compelling Editorial

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

Web Copy Guidelines

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

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

Crafting the Language

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

A Clean Narrative Path

- Describe the buttons and links
  - A void GIF guessing games
- Every “click here” is a failure of language
- Guide the reader forward, backward and linkward