

# The 5 C's of Quality Content

by Laura Orsini



**1** Make your content **CLEAR**. Avoid overuse of jargon and acronyms in your sales copy. Unless you have a specialty Web site where **only** people intimately familiar with your industry and/or business will visit it, make sure your language is understandable to the broadest possible audience. Get someone objective (i.e., not in the industry) to read it for you. If

they don't get it, chances are some of your potential customers won't get it either.

**2** Make it **CONCISE** — even for long-copy sales letters. **Most people have a tendency to overwrite.** Be precise with your language. Avoid run-on sentences. Avoid long, meandering phrases when one or two words will do.

Rule of thumb: Polish your written piece until it gleams. Get it to where you think it's perfect. Then go back and cut it by 25%.

"Not possible!" you say.

Oh, but it is. Get rid of phrases like "of the" and *all the extra* instances of "that". Delete redundancies like "simple, effortless, and easy-to-use." Sometimes more is better, as in **more specific features and benefits**. Other times, more is just more — and might actually work against ease of reading and understanding — which means it works against you.

**3** Make your content **COMPELLING**. Use motivating language. Detail your features and benefits. Give people a reason to want to buy from you or use your service. An isolated product list probably is not going to compel anyone all by itself. However, and this is **Rule Number Two: Whatever you do, do not ever lie or misrepresent yourself!** This will only come back to harm you in the long (or not-so-long) run.

If you claim to have contacts who are producers at Warner Bros., you'd better be sure the person you know at Warner Bros. is not the sister of the assistant to the catering manager. Or if you offer 2-day delivery at no extra charge, you'd better be ready to fulfill that promise, even if you receive 1,000 orders in a day!

**4** Make it **CONSISTENT**. This is another place where you can tell a sloppy writer from one who takes time to double- and triple-check their work before they publish it and/or send it out.

Is it **on line**, **online**, or **on-line**?

Is your style **ABC Deli** or **A.B.C. Deli**?

How do you format phone numbers? Do you use **602.253.8463** or **602/253.8463** or **(602) 253-8463**?

There is not necessarily a correct answer to these ones. Simply determine what your personal and/or company standard is, and stick to it. One of the worst offenses of inconsistency appears when there are several different spellings or phone number styles within a single document. Mistakes like these make your work — and by extension, you and your company — appear sloppy.

**5** Make it **CORRECT**. Proper grammar and spelling are essential!!! There's no way to state this strongly enough, particularly with respect to Web copy. There is so much competition for business on the Web — if you have sloppy copy that is badly spelled and riddled with grammatical mistakes, the next site is just one click away — and you won't get a second chance to bring those lost visitors back.

Although everyone makes a mistake now and again, *please do not underestimate the importance of correct grammar*. If you don't know whether it's correct or not, ASK someone who knows, LOOK IT UP in a book or online resource, or PAY a professional proofreader.

The most glaring errors:

- ♦ **Stupid spelling mistakes.** Write your copy in Word and SPELLCHECK before you dump it into HTML (or Publisher, PowerPoint, or whatever other format you use for your other sales materials).
  - ♦ **Missing and incorrectly used apostrophes.** Again, there's no excuse for this mistake — and it is one that will set you apart from the others in your industry.
- ➔ **TIP: Use ALL CAPS sparingly.** Text written in ALL CAPS is exceptionally difficult to read. The fact is that the shape of a word, as much as its spelling, facilitates quick reading. Words written exclusively in capital letters lose the shape differentiation caused by the ascenders (b, d, f, h, k, l, t) and descenders (g, j, p, q, y). As a result, words written in ALL CAPS take a great deal more effort to read.

Remember, it is virtually impossible to edit your own work. You're too close to the material and have seen it too many times to even notice errors any longer. If you find yourself in a position where you must edit your own writing, take a significant break from it — two hours, at minimum, but two days is suggested. This will allow you to return to your work with "new eyes," able to spot errors you would likely have missed had you not taken the break.

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