Implementing Web Content

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Appealing Web Content

When writing content for a web site, it is best to think of it more in terms of an advertising or public relations piece than of an academic nature. Key terms should be used whenever possible, and wordy verbiage should be avoided. Among the points to consider are voice, spelling, grammar, graphics, key phrases and format.

Voice and Format

The voice of the content is the wording and slang or lack of slang used in the content. Voice should represent the target audience and what is comfortable to them. If the content ends up being too formal or too informal for the target audience, it might leave them with a negative feeling or cause them to stop reading all together. Nothing should be described in extreme detail either as this can result in them missing key points from content that is too wordy. The average visitor needs to be captured within two minutes (McNamara 2003). Avoiding these precautions can cause a potential student or faculty member to lose interest in the college and the university.

One important thing to remember is this will not be an academic paper. Write as if it was for the CEO of a company who only had a few minutes to read and pick the best proposal out of all that had been submitted. Avoid clever puns and jokes and stick to the point. Using an outline to format the content is recommended. Do not be afraid to use bullet points and plenty of subtitles (Next Design 2006).

Spelling and Grammar

“Little inconsistencies in our written language bother visitors (McNamara 2003).” In the information industry, there are terms there are not specifically defined and therefore are used in many different contexts and even have various appropriate spellings.
For example, if e-mail is used in one part of the site, it should be that way throughout. The user should not see E-Mail or Email or any other variation of the term. The inability to stay consistent can leave a user with a lack of faith in the author. Grammar is important as well. Paying attention to the tense in which you are writing and remaining consistent can have a positive affect on the end user. “Writing in the active tense makes for a more compelling read (Next Design 2006).” Be sure that punctuation makes sense and sentences and key points do not drone on and bore the user.

**Graphics**

Load time is an extremely important issue that impacts a user’s perspective and length of stay on a web site. In 1999, Jakob Nielsen created a list of web design mistakes. Although over five years old, much of this list is still valid today, including graphics and how they can create slow response times. According to Nielsen, to the end user, it does not matter why the page was slow to load; to them it portrays poor service, and the chance of them leaving the site before they have finished browsing is great (Nielsen 1999). In the content arena, graphics should only been used when absolutely needed and when they greatly enhance how the user interprets the content. CSS can be used in place of graphics to create graphic like items such as backgrounds for the content.

**Key Phrases**

Sticking to the same key phrases and terms is important in keeping visitors and users focused. Using synonyms and various wording will only confuse the user and cause them to potentially not understand the point the piece is trying to convey. Key terms and phrases are also used by search engines to include the site in search results and bring more visitors to the site.
Developing Content for the Web

Developing content for the web can be a tedious task. There are different ways content can be created. Tweaking the design of the page can make most content display the way it is needed, but this is not necessarily the best route to take. The design should not create the content; it should change the look and feel of the page. Likewise, the content should not have any design aspects incorporated into it either.

Extensible Hyper Text Markup Language (XHTML) is the most efficient and most widely-used way to create content for the web. Initially, it may require more work than designing and creating content in one step, but, in the long run, it will ease a lot of tension when moving to different platforms and web site formats. XHTML is a stricter version of Hyper Text Markup Language (HTML). Unlike HTML, which is an application of Standard Generalized Markup Language (SGML), XHTML is an application of Extensible Markup Language (XML). Well-formed syntax is important in XHTML. “Documents allow for automated processing to be performed using a standard XML library – unlike HTML, which requires a relatively complex, lenient, and generally custom parser (Wikipedia 2006).”

XHTML “delivers a standardized markup that separates display and layout code from syntax, making the creation, maintenance, and parsing of documents much easier for all involved (Wiggin 2002).” XHTML was created by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) to be a more formulated way to create web content. Two main reasons are given by the W3C for using XHTML. First and foremost, the X stands for extensible. New elements can be added to the code without severely altering the code.
Also, XHTML is portable. Non desktop and personal computer devices will be able to easily read XHTML content, whereas HTML is almost impossible to use with PDA’s, cellular phones, and televisions (Wiggin 2002).

XML is used in XHTML which makes it more stable. Since it ensures the content is properly marked up, it creates well-formed documents. Only personal computers can interpret bad markup language, and therefore XHTML ensures the content can be read on multiple devices, which is coming increasingly more popular. Some syntax rules for XHTML include (W3Schools 2006):

- Attributes must be in lower case only
- Attribute values must be quoted
- Attribute minimization is forbidden
- The name attribute is replaced by the id attribute
- The DTD for XHTML defines mandatory elements

**Migrating Web Content to a Content Management System**

Chances are, if the web site currently in existence is older than a few years, it is more than likely coded in HTML without any style sheets or XHTML coding. This means that the content and the design of the page is all in one file, which can cause problems when the decision is made to switch to a Content Management System (CMS).

While most CMS’s will allow for HTML coding, using an XHTML format will result in must cleaner coding and the ability for uses to utilize other functions such as converting the article into printable or PDF format. Not to mention, it will allow for Section 508 compliance. Jennifer Kyrnin notes six steps to help convert HTML to
XHTML. She notes similar syntax rules as W3Schools. Some additional items mentioned are that all end tags be closed, strict adherence to the language, and a second validation from an online XHTML validation tool (Kyrnin 2006).

The easiest way I have found to begin this process is to copy and paste the existing HTML code into notepad. This will put it in plain text so it is easier to convert into strict XHTML. When this is done, I then break it into sections and add indentation into the code to help with organization. The code is now ready to be converted.

Since the content will be used in a Content Management System, the DTD and CSS do not need to be specified, as this will be done from the administration panel. Simply remove the formatting such as color, font, and size specifications, and make sure all end tags are closed and that the code is clean. Afterwards, check the code with a validation tool. The content is then ready to be inserted as a piece of the Content Management System.
References


