

## Seminars

### ***Content: make-do and mend***

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**Catherine Toole** is the founder and CEO of the digital copywriting agency Sticky Content. In 2012, Sticky Content is providing content strategy, web writing training, auditing and copywriting services to clients such as Belron (Autoglass), Sage, Post Office®, Sony Europe, Lloyds TSB, John Lewis Partnership and Virgin Atlantic.

A former journalist, she has spent the past 15 years specialising in web, email, mobile and social media content projects for a wide range of clients, agencies and government departments. Catherine runs micro-content and content strategy seminars for the Nielsen Norman Group worldwide, is a trainer for Econsultancy and sits on the executive committee of the British Interactive Media Association (BIMA).

This session used **case studies** and **takeaway tips** on how to ensure the content we develop is both effective and efficient. This included developing content marketing on a budget, obtaining the most value from the content we already have and investigated tiny copy changes that deliver measurable results.

#### **What can content do for you?**

This session is about austerity measures content. Who feels they need to be able to use content with rationed budgets and time? [most delegates put up their hands].

I used to be a journalist, working for tabloids and broadsheets and trade publications. If you can be interesting about business you can be interesting about anything. When I set up Sticky Content 16 years ago, the web was still quite new and one of our first clients was Confetti.co.uk, a wedding and special occasions website. My brief was to write a website which was 'bigger' than 'Wedding Guide'. *Why did they say that?* They literally meant loads of content because that was how revenue was raised – through advertising on the site, page impressions, length of visit etc. The publishing-like readership figures were the basis of our advertising income. Now there are many ways of raising revenue from content but it is less and less to do with digital advertising.

Digital copywriting is now very different from ten years' ago. It's a moving target which is changing all the time. At the moment, micro-content fixing is especially important – the tiny pieces of copy are crucial. We will have a look at some of this later.

*How many of you have a content strategy?* [one delegate had a content strategy]. Very often when people come to my training sessions, they have come with instructions to create a digital content strategy, and what they mean by this, is a PowerPoint presentation which is circulated around the organisation called 'our

content strategy' which can be emailed to anyone who wants it. It doesn't work like that though; it is a continually evolving set of processes.

In practice, what we do are three main things: digital copywriting, content strategy and training, seminars and workshops.

My client list does not include anyone very arty. Imagine writing content about binding things together or windscreens and how much easier should it be then to write content about the arts?

Anyone who has a child in primary school will be familiar with the mantra: 'reduce, reuse, recycle'. This is a useful way of thinking about our content.

### Austerity measures

Times are hard. We have recently come out of a recession and there are cuts which are now affecting us. Budgets are rationed, time is rationed; there is pressure to be efficient.

Are you wasting money? There are three key areas where you might be:

1. **Not being strategic.** According to Kristina Holverson's 'Content Strategy for the Web' this involves: 'planning for the creation, delivery and governance of content'. When I ask people where their attention is, most of it is dedicated to creation or delivery. They have lots of good 'reasons' why they have no time to plan or govern what they're doing. But if you're not planning well, the content tends to be less effective, you're not measuring it, you're not mapping it to users, insights, tasks etc. And because you're not governing it properly, it varies widely in quality, with inconsistency of tone of voice, usability, and search terms. Content strategy is about spending equality of time across all the four areas – planning, creating, delivering and governing.

The result can produce woeful examples. [CT then showed examples from websites]. Often, they are more about the company than the customer [right] or have great creative ideas but not mapped to strategy.



Anytime you map your content to a user insight – a proper target audience that you can substantiate – the content works better. Dell AB tested their B2B customers and found that a simple site with four key things on was more effective than a beautiful site showing all their products. It was based on the four things that people/organisations were most likely to want after

they had purchased a Dell computer: check your order status, contact technical support, browse pc and home services and buy accessories.

This morning there was lots of talk about user journey mapping, but I think user personas are the first things to look at. If you are going to plan for better content it's worth creating pen portraits of your users. They don't need to be complicated and it can be fun doing your own workshop.

The Natural History Museum has been widely praised and it works because one of the key reasons is that they have mapped personas against content well. The site used to be based on serious and worthy scientific material which was only of interest to a small proportion of the audience. Analysing more carefully who was using the NHM enabled them to produce four key personas. This is one.



Here's Samantha. She's 10. Samantha lives in Maidenhead, is threatening to become a vegetarian and desperately wants to save the planet. She used to think that Christina Aguilera was cool but is now into Girls Aloud and McFly. Samantha has a pond in her garden and her mum has suggested that they go to the Natural History Museum for the day so that Samantha can find out how to get newts to breed in the pond. Goal: To satisfy her passion for animals and the natural world.

Once you've done this sort of pen portrait you are ready to answer the next question which is, what sort of content does Samantha want?

The other three key personas were: Tracy the General Visitor, Colin the Teacher and Neil the Nature Enthusiast.

The resulting website provided content for all four personas. The "Dino Jaws" show and the "Kids only" navigation button for Samantha, the "Visit us" information for casual visitors like Tracey and possibly

Colin, the Education section aimed at teachers like Colin, and for the enthusiast Neil, there's the Wildlife Photographer feature, the "Take part" section where he can get more involved, and maybe even "Research and curation" in the top menu.



- 2. Measurement.** We need to know what is working or not working, but we can't do that until we know what we are trying to achieve. When I worked for Bartle Bogle Hegarty .. we used to ask *'What do we want people to think, feel or do?'* [about a piece of advertising, writing etc...]

[Catherine demonstrated a variety of arts websites she had studied examining how their copy worked / didn't work. She apologised for offending people in advance, saying it was her immediate response to the way they had been put together based on her experience in this field].

Many arts organisations are keen to persuade people to donate money but if you look at the Donate page on the Royal Opera House it is very confusing. One of the problems it has is that it mixes features, benefits and technical information. It asks us to donate but there is no clear reason why. One moment it gives us a benefit such as *'Becoming a Friend of Covent Garden is the best way to keep up with news and events ...'* which is great, and in the very next paragraph it hits us with *'Please note membership ordered over the internet will be sent to the recipient but if you would prefer to have it sent to you first, please make your order over the telephone ...'* This is the point at which my mother would worry! She's immediately being asked to make some kind of technical choice that she probably doesn't understand. In terms of usability it's also rather dull – and this is the ROH, an amazing organisation.

It's difficult writing benefits-based copy but it doesn't cost anything. You don't need to spend 18 months writing a strategy document, just fix this.






There is some very engaging copy on the same site with video which brings the membership to life but it's not connected to the Donate page.

The Old Vic on its 'Support' page starts by saying: *'Since we opened our doors under Kevin Spacey's Artistic Directorship in 2004, we have attracted over a million people into the theatre. But ticket sales alone are not enough to pay for our broad spectrum of work and the upkeep of our historic building. The Old Vic Trust receives no government subsidy and each year we need to raise £2.7 million. Any surplus made from productions by the Theatre Company are invested back in the Trust.'* Who cares about this? The theatre does but do I? Why would I be a potential donor? What is the benefit to me? Remember also that people skim read online – think about if they are reading on a small device. What sort of words do you pick out?

Looking at who does it well, Tate has scan-able copy which outlines the clear benefits of donating to the organisation. On the 'joining' page it tells me what's in it for me, not the history of the organisation or an outline of its

financial problems although even this tells us that we will receive a 'Tate etc' magazine without telling us what it is or why it's any good.

If you want to look at successful fundraising online have a look at Barack Obama. His campaign spent considerable time testing which approaches worked best, one of the most interesting being the labels you give buttons.

Variations	Never Signed Up	Signed Up, Never Donated	Previously Donated
	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	+2.3%	+27.8%	+16.3%
	-27.8%	N/A	N/A
	+15.2%	-24.6%	+11.9%
	+8.5%	+2.9%	+18.4%

This was split test and then multi-variant tested and of course different words worked for different people. 'Donate now' was the most powerful generic button, but every group had a different preference.

It teaches us that copy optimisation is very subtle and it also shows you can't predict what will work – the testing provided some surprises.

**3. Make rules and formats.** If I asked you all to write your biography now you'd come up with all sorts of things – they would be long, short, formal, informal etc. However, if I gave you instructions like: first write your name, job title, tell me the three most important about your job etc we would have a format that could be used.

Frequently, formats that work are copied, like celebrity magazines laughing at celebrities pages – you'll see the same thing all over the world.

What about a recipe? When I say 'recipe' you have an immediate idea of what I mean. You see a recipe and you know instantly what it is: ingredients, how many it serves, picture, method etc.

Peter Morville, in *'Ambient Findability'* speaks of navigating by genre:

- Genre supports document findability
- Genre supports document recognition
- Genre supports navigation within a document

Using these formats help you to cut corners. What is a FAQ? People know already – nothing has to be invented.



Using the Blue Peter way of doing things it means showing people one you've done earlier. If you are training people or working with your own team in an organisation it's important to help people work within established frameworks otherwise you end up with a mess.

This takes us into governance – the fourth part of the square of plan, create, deliver and govern. YouTube have a long list of guidelines about a very small piece of copy which should accompany videos on their site. Many of you are producing a great deal of material for YouTube and it's silly to spend so much time developing this work without doing the basic stuff about how it is labelled, described online.

A key part of our guidance about content is the tone of voice. How do you make your copy sound like you and not a committee? You probably need to give specific examples – show what it actually means to be 'friendly' – how does it translate?

Copy by committee can be a disaster, even with the best intentions: lawyers, chief executives, even our friendly search engine optimisation colleagues who tell us to put certain key words in can ruin copy. This copy is a good example: *'Even More Legroom is available for a fee, based on flight length, on flights after April 1. This fee is refundable with the purchase of a refundable fare and in situations in which JetBlue fails to provide the Even More Legroom product.'* It begs questions all the way along the line.

Glyndebourne, an organisation I admire, does this in this section, begging questions. I think it was probably given to them by a third party.

**Remember to make your Will in November** — Which year? And why should I?

Gifts in wills form the foundation of charities in the UK. Many charities depend on legacies and without them they would not exist. ~~In fact, while 74% of the UK population support charities, only 7% currently leave a legacy to them when writing a Will.~~ — What's that got to do with Glyndebourne?

~~OK, but what's that got to do with Glyndebourne?~~ — Right, but I'm interested in Glyndebourne

**What month?** — This month we are hoping we can encourage you our supporters to consider leaving a charitable gift in your will to Glyndebourne, after you have looked after family and friends. Leaving a gift in your will helps us to ensure that future generations receive as much pleasure from a visit to Glyndebourne as the audiences who visit today. — Me? Or all your supporters?

**Eh?** — Me? And my children? Or 'future generations and audiences'?

November is **National Make a Will Month** and to encourage people to think about making a will during November **Will Aid** works with solicitors all over the UK to make a will and waive fees in return for a donation to charity. Find out more at [willaid.org.uk](http://willaid.org.uk) — Who is Will Aid?

Should I leave the site now?

Every time I'm trying to answer questions I am no longer focusing on what I need to feel and do.

Many organisations will have subject experts – who know about the subject but don't know about usability – and don't know how to write for the web. There are some big important companies that ought to know better which do this – see Clement's view from KPMG.

And to show I am not being vindictive about Glyndebourne, there is a beautiful and inspirational piece on their web from Grayson Perry. They could do even more like this.

### Reduce, Re-use, Recycle

As we said earlier, it is important to apply this to content.

- Reduce – we all have plenty of material that can be cut
- Re-use – a good acronym is COPE: create once publish everywhere. If you create material which is modular and could be reused in different places this will save resources.
- Recycle – you need to get your editor's head on and decide what could be recycled in other places. Plan the way in which it can be reused. The Royal Ballet filmed a whole day and have chopped it up and used it in different ways.

A few final tips around copy optimisation

- Copy nudges. The government has invested a great deal in this – such as moving the declaration on tax return forms to the top
- Facebook changed 'become a fan' to 'like' and massively increased response. It's just a very slight tweak but with big consequences.
- Model an outcome: 'get started now' rather than 'click here to sign up'.
- Urgency: 'only for the next 24 hours'. Twitter is great for this. 'Last day of the exhibition'
- Welcome. As part of the research for this presentation I got my colleague to sign up to 50 of the e-newsletters of people here today. Good websites welcome you, give you something as a reward for signing up, and tell you what you will get if you sign up. Not very many of the 50 newsletters provided any reasons for signing up or benefits for joining. There were a few good cases like The National Gallery, The Comedy Store, The Barbican.

Finally, here's an optimisation equation from Marketing Experiments:

$$C = 4m + 3v + 2(i-f) - 2a \text{ ©}$$

Conversion = 4 x motivation + 3 x value + 2 (incentive - friction) – 2 x anxiety

Let's use this in our work.