



Accelerate - Lesson 4 - WRITING FOR THE WEB

On completion of this lesson you should:

- Be aware of what to consider before you start writing – objectives, target personas, brand voice, calls to action
- Understand the different online writing formats – micro form, short form, long form communications including tweets, status updates, emarketing communications, blogs, news, e-books & special reports.
- Be able to hone your social media post skills
- Be aware of the all important landing page
- Be aware of SEO considerations when writing for the web
- Gain inspiration for writing headlines
- Be aware of the key principles of effective writing
- Be aware of some creative ways to get writing even if you're not a writer!

In this lesson, as with many lessons in the Accelerate program, we are going to assume a certain level of knowledge for this lesson, and presume that you:

- have already got a website or blog onto which you can write content for
- have got social networks onto which you can prepare content
- have already got an e-marketing system onto which you can write and broadcast content

If you haven't, we suggest you participate in the following modules:

- Website Design & Development

- Social media for Business
 - Emarketing
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INTRODUCTION

Writing for the web is **DISTINCTLY** different from writing for other mediums, so don't think by any means that if you are a good writer, or if you contract a professional writer/PR company or journalist that they will necessarily be effective at writing for the web.

The quality of the copy (the words) used within your Digital Marketing Campaign can dramatically affect the results of the campaign, so it's a good idea to spend some time honing your skills on this in this week's lesson.

The key thing to remember is that the clearer and compelling your writing on the web is to understand, the more likely customers are to take the desired i.e. click on a link, sign up to a database, enter a competition, purchase a product, refer a friend etc.

Realistically, we could devote an entire program just to Writing for the Web (and maybe one day we will!) but for now in this lesson we'll focus on writing for the web in the context of what you need to know for mobilising a digital marketing campaign, namely social media posts, online ads, copy for EDMs (electronic direct marketing) and landing pages on a website.

WHO ARE YOU WRITING FOR?

Copy that will resonate with a teenage boy, is decidedly different to copy that will resonate with a female retiree. For this reason, it's important to have your target persona firmly in mind when you write copy for any online medium. (For the uninitiated, "copy" refers to the words written for all kinds of mediums, online and off).

Reflect back on the work you did on your target personas in Lesson 1 and keep them in mind when writing any kind of copy.

Remember what problems they have in a day and how your product or service can solve that problem. Try and weave this into the content.

A few tips and considerations to ensure you are writing for your target persona:

- **Use the words your users use.** By using keywords that your users use, it will help you connect initially with the right users on the search engines through optimisation (though you should also take into consideration search volumes and competition etc. topics we

cover in the Get Up To Speed program), and then to connect with the users in terms of impact.

- **Consider length of content, subject to the end user.** For instance as a general rule, older audiences will be much more prepared to read longer form content (they love knowing the whole deal) whereas younger markets tend to skim read, and prefer to have as little copy as possible. Truth be known, some younger markets would probably prefer a video of the written word, so consider this also!
 - **Use images, diagrams, or multimedia** to visually represent ideas in the content. Videos and images should reinforce the text on your page. Consider what types of imagery (photos and what of, cartoons, icons, abstract?) will connect with your target persona. For instance if you are targeting an older market will your images feature people with grey hair, or younger models?
 - **Consider the 'tone and voice'** which will appeal to the market you are writing for. Should it be professional and corporate? Fun and friendly? Even cheeky (think Virgin Airlines brand). Think about how other brands use copy to connect with their target personas, and follow their lead if you have a similar target market. And if you don't think you can do it justice i.e. it's a market you just don't know well, get help! There's nothing worse than copy which is trying to be something it isn't! The readers will see straight through it!
 - **Where do they look for information and solutions?** Do they start with a Google search? Do they ask friends on social media?
 - **How do they search?** On a mobile? Tablet? Desktop?
 - **What types of media do they consume?** Social media? Printed material? Emails?
 - **Know your target persona.** Use your LinkedIn Insights, Facebook Insights and other third party software to see which of your previous posts have been the best received and try to emulate that success.
 - **Consider your audience's "appetite" which could vary from person to person even within the one target persona due to personality and inclination.** For instance one person might be willing to invest thirty minutes watching a detailed webinar, someone else might only be willing to scan the headlines in a summary blog post. Give your audience options to get the information any which way they want it. The key thing is that they are getting the information you want them to have.
 - **Audience attention:** Your audience is not always tuned in. Repetition helps you reach more of your audience more consistently. You may make the same tweet twice for instance, but schedule it at different times of the day to capture different audiences, or to reinforce the offer. Don't feel like a pest. Sometimes people really do want what you have to offer, they just need a friendly reminder.
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WHAT FORMAT ARE YOU WRITING FOR?

- **Microform (tweets, status updates, & social media posts)**

- **Short form content (blogging, EDMs & press releases/news pieces)**
- **Sales or landing pages**
- **Long form content (Ebooks, Special Reports, templates & worksheets)**

Some people prefer text, some audio, others video. For some it depends where they are when they receive it, and how they receive the information i.e. on a mobile or desktop.

Some people prefer short 'bite size' information when it comes to reading communication, while others are more thorough in their approach and would like to know the whole kit and caboodle and all the ins and outs.

Think long and hard about the right format for your target persona/s, and consider that writing for the web also involves mixing up your writing formats over the course of any given digital marketing campaign.

For instance a digital marketing campaign may involve a series of pre-written and scheduled tweets and status updates, combined with one or more EDMs (electronic direct messages), some blog posts and some copywriting on a web page.

Some principals remain the same across the different formats, while they also have distinct nuances too. Let's explore their similarities and differences now:

1. Microform – Tweets, status updates / social media posts

Being effective with writing copy for social networks is a real skill to hone as it is the shortest form of content out there. The skills lies in being able to grab attention with a powerful statement within the post (in many ways tweets and status updates are a lot like headlines), and giving them a clear direction on what you want them to do next – in many cases to click through to a link for more information. If done correctly, writing effective social media posts can have a massive impact on your campaign.

Here's some tips to hone your social media post skills:

- What will grab their attention? Your post should be up to date, informative, relevant and attention grabbing.
- Be brief - Whilst you have 140 characters on Twitter, 420 on Facebook, 250 on LinkedIn, aim to use no more than 80 characters. Research shows the shorter the post, the more likely it is to be shared/retweeted etc.
- Ask questions - Engage with your audience by asking questions.
- Always add a link - Adding a link to your update will help direct people to more information or the action you want them to take. Include a link with every post! Use a shortener service such as bit.ly, goo.gl or Hootsuite so you can track how many people are clicking through from your post. • Use all the space, including the link description -

When you share a link, you have the opportunity on some social networks to edit your description. Use this space also, but still be concise and encourage people to click on the link.

- Be positive – positivity breeds engagement and sharing. It will help inspire and excite your users.
- Consider timing – post when the audience is listening and not just at a time which suits you. Use a scheduling tool if you need to.
- Cause intrigue – Updates which get people clicking offer something, but often cause a sense of intrigue which makes the readers want to click!
- Don't sacrifice grammar and spelling – Just because you have fewer characters to play with, try not to throw your dictionary out the window. This will aggravate some target personas.
- Use questions, facts and figures – Some people love stats and facts to throw some of these in the mix and position as an authority.
- Tag people in - Where relevant use @ mentions to engage influencers to engage with and retweet/share your social posts. • Invite conversation - Create posts that ask your audience for their ideas, opinions or even advice.
- Show a human side - Show your readers you're not only an expert, but that you care about them.
- Use hashtags - Increase your posts reach by adding relevant hashtags to your post. If the post is related to the campaign and you've defined a campaign hashtag (outlined in week 1) drop this in. Consider doing some research on other relevant hashtags you could be using in your post to increase reach. A good tool to use to find which hashtags may be relevant and which hashtags might be more powerful than others include www.hashtagify.com and www.twitalyzer.com

SHORT FORM CONTENT: Blogging, EDMs & press releases/news pieces

Short form content is longer than a status update, but not pages and pages worth. There is a wide range of opinion on the ideal length of a blog post, EDM (electronic direct mail), press release/general news piece, but we've always been of the philosophy that you write for as long as you have something to say i.e. don't let the quantity of words dictate the quality of your post.

BLOG POSTS AS PART OF A DIGITAL MARKETING CAMPAIGN

A blog post could be as few as 200 – 250 words with an image or video, or as long as 800 – 1000 words. The average length however is around 300 – 500 words.

Pamela Vaughan from Hubspot refers to six key parts when it comes to the anatomy of a lead-generating blog post:

- Eye-catching title
- In-text links to landing pages

- Sidebar/banner calls to action
- Social sharing buttons
- Call to action at the bottom
- Relevancy—making sure the post is relevant from top to bottom

In the context of a Digital Marketing campaign, a blog post could be used to:

1. Announce a promotion or campaign ([see this example which was done as part of a digital marketing campaign by our sister company The Creative Collective](#))
2. Inform your audience of an issue related to your business i.e. This blog post by [RAC about the importance of wearing a seatbelt.](#)
3. [Promote another company's product or service on your blog](#) who will in turn support your digital marketing campaign by posting or blogging about your promotion, competition, service or product (a reciprocal partnership arrangement).
4. [Showcase the people who work for the organisation that the end user may get to work with if they engage you](#) (particularly relevant for a service based organisation)
5. [Promote an explainer video or trailer video](#) that you are using as part of the overall digital marketing campaign.

In terms of how much you should blog, the message is basically as much as you can, but again you wouldn't post solely about the digital marketing campaign. It should be a careful mix of what you think your audience will find of interest. But if you can manage it, some sources say up to 20 times a month!

[See this resource for the anatomy of a blog post by Ginny Soskey](#)

ONLINE PRESS RELEASES AS PART OF A DIGITAL MARKETING CAMPAIGN

Press releases would generally be 300 – 500 words also (around one page to two pages of content on an A4 sheet, at 12 point Times New Roman, and including headlines.

[Download this template of a press release](#)

You can use press releases as part of your Digital Marketing Campaign by writing a release and not only sending it to a list of predetermined offline media contacts, but also by adding this to a range of both free and paid press release websites or as they are sometimes called, newswires.

Here is a range of online newswires you may like to consider adding your press release to as part of your Digital Marketing campaign (some are free and some are paid):

Online Newswires

- PR Newswire www.prnewswire.com

- AAP Newswire www.aapnewswire.com.au
- Australia Newswire www.australia-newswire.com
- PR Web www.prweb.com
- Newswire www.newswire.com

Apart from listing the press release on sites like these, you could also post the release to the 'notes' section of your Facebook page, post it on your blog or website as a page, and then share the link across to your Facebook page and other social media networks. As previously mentioned, don't worry about saying the same or similar thing. Mix up the communication medium, and serve similar messages on several occasions to make an impact.

COPYWRITING FOR THE ALL IMPORTANT LANDING PAGE AS PART OF A DIGITAL MARKETING CAMPAIGN

As you would have noticed from Lesson 1, one of the key questions we ask clients when we work with them on a digital marketing campaign, is what landing page we will be sending people back to as part of the campaign. We'll then always check this out, and consider if we think it will convert. We could 'not care' about whether it does or not, but if you want to ensure your campaign has every chance of success, it is very important to evaluate the landing page carefully, and potentially even test it through what is called A/B testing.

Your options when it comes to landing pages for a digital marketing campaign include:

- 1) Sending traffic back to an existing website page on the website – perhaps the whole campaign is centred around driving sales for an existing product or service. If so, there may be no need to create a dedicated landing page for the campaign, provided you think it will convert.
- 2) Creating a dedicated campaign landing page on the website – Give careful consideration to the objectives and target market of the campaign, as well as the key messages. Then carefully write the copy you feel connect with the audience and induce the desired action for the campaign. Don't be afraid to repeat the call to action in several locations throughout the landing page, so whether people choose to take the action after reading just the first paragraph, or the entire scribe, they have the choice. On this point, some people are all about the long-winded sales letter/sales page, where you have garish blue and red titles, lots of testimonials, and screeds of text urging you to take the desired action, and trying every which sales ploy on the way down. Others prefer a more sedate approach. Suffice to say, whether a long winded sales letter or more snappy landing page will suit your audience needs to be trialled and tested.
- 3) Creating a dedicated campaign landing page on a third party software – There are a range of software's which are dedicated to allowing you to mobilise a crash hot campaign landing page. This is a good option to opt for if:
 - a) you don't have access to, or can't easily update your existing website, or would need to pay a fortune to your service provider to make the necessary updates

- b) don't have faith in the look and feel and conversion potential of your existing website
- c) want to use a third party software which has all the desired features of a high performing landing page which your website may not

Systems worth exploring on this front include:

- Unbounce.com
- Leadpages.net
- Instapages.com
- Optimizely.net A desirable landing page will include
- Clear and compelling headline
- Copy that is concise, error free and uses good grammar
- Copy that supports your case, builds trust and leads to conversion
- Calls to action that directs your reader
- Supporting images and video
- Links in moderation (avoid distraction)

[The anatomy of a desirable landing page \[Infographic\]](#)

EXERCISE: What short form communications may you need for your digital marketing campaign? Social posts? Blogs? Press releases? Landing pages? Who will prepare these? What timing is desirable to release these different communications in line with your campaign plan? Give this some thought and include it in your digital marketing plan.

LONG FORM CONTENT: Ebooks, Special Reports, templates and worksheets

Longer form content is unlikely to be a resource you need to create for your digital marketing campaign, but it is worth mentioning in the context of writing for the web as they can be used as lead generation tools in the lead up to a digital marketing campaign.

Probably the best people on the planet for creating ebooks and special reports and getting people onto their list are Hubspot. Hubspot are notorious for creating ebooks, templates, worksheets and infographics, promoting them with killer headlines and marketing copy, and making you WANT to sign up on their lists to access these cool resources.

Here are a range of great templates to help you create eBooks, special reports and more quickly and easily, even if you're not a designer!

<http://offers.hubspot.com/ebook-templates>

<http://www.inboundpro.net/ebook-templates-free-download/>

<http://ezebooktemplates.com/free-templates>

<http://ebookwritingmastery.com/template/>

EXERCISE: What topic could you write an ebooks, Special Reports, templates and worksheets to entice people onto your list in the lead up to a digital marketing campaign? What information do you think your target persona are seeking, and would be prepared to sign up to a list to access? Have you got the facilities on your website to add this feature? What would it take to get it into place?

SEO CONSIDERATIONS FOR WRITING FOR THE WEB

If you have the skills of writing good clear and engaging copy, and combine that skill with knowledge of SEO and the ability to 'optimise' content i.e. write with a certain set of keywords in mind, you're worth your weight in gold! Apart from adhering to the points above when writing for the web, for some publically facing formats i.e. blog posts, landing pages and online press releases, you also need to give consideration to search engine optimization, a subject covered over three weeks in the Get Up To Speed program, and which if you feel you need more information on, you could always purchase online modules about.

But in short, search engine optimisation (also known as seo) is the use of various techniques to improve a website's 'organic' or non paid ranking in search engines in the hopes of attracting more visitors.

Even if you do get someone who says they are a copywriter, check out their credentials carefully if getting the content optimised is important to the success of your campaign. And if you're doing the copywriting yourself, bare in mind that search engines rank pages, not websites, so for any given page (whether it be a blog post, a landing page, or other general page on your website), conduct keyword research, select your keywords carefully, and then focus on optimising for one keyword phrase throughout the copy.

The header tags are still important when it comes to SEO. The most important heading on the page should be the H1 and there is usually only one H1 on any given page. The H1 is something which search engines scan to get a sense of what the page is about, so make it relevant!

Subheadings should be H2s, sub-subheadings should be H3s, etc.

Each heading should contain valuable keywords; if not, it's a wasted heading For longer pieces of content, a heading is also what helps a reader skip to the parts that he/she finds interesting.

When it comes to the body copy, you should be aiming for 3-4% keyword density, that is, for every 100 words your copy is, the word or key phrase should be mentioned 3-4 times. T

o check on the keyword density for any body of copy you have written, a good tool to use is:

www.keywordanalyzer.org

IMPORTANT: Don't overdo the optimising as just as much as the search engines can increase your rankings for well optimised content, they can also penalise you for overdoing it. 5-10% density is not desirable! Tone it down if you start to hit these limits.

A few more tips on Writing for Search Engines

The State University of New York at Plattsburgh offers these helpful writing tips:

- Google likes text
- Google likes formatting
- Google likes freshness • Google likes accessibility
- Google likes outbound hyperlinks
- Googlebot isn't psychic, so remember to link your pages
- Google likes you to tell it where you are
- Google likes experts

Other key principles of good copy:

- Don't forget the inverted pyramid – This point particularly applies to long form content. Imagine a pyramid shape. Now turn it upside down. Then think about writing something. Put the most important information in the first para or two. Consider what will make an impact. Give them enough to get them interested, but not everything (a sense of intrigue will keep them reading on). Then in the second or third para, put less important stuff, then less and less. We also like to put punctuation at the end of our inverted pyramids with a call to action. If I have read the whole pyramid or body of copy, now what? What do you want me to do? Add a clear call to action.
- Chunk your content. Chunking makes your content more scannable by breaking it into manageable sections.
- Front-load the important information. Use the journalism model of the “inverted pyramid.” Start with the content that is most important to your audience, and then provide additional details.
- Use pronouns. The user is “you.” The organisation or government agency is “we.” This creates cleaner sentence structure and more approachable content.
- Use active voice. “The board proposed the legislation” not “The regulation was proposed by the board.”
- Use short sentences and paragraphs. The ideal standard is no more than 20 words per sentence, five sentences per paragraph. Use dashes instead of semicolons or, better yet, break the sentence into two. It is ok to start a sentence with “and,” “but,” or “or” if it makes things clear and brief.
- Use bullets and numbered lists - Don't limit yourself to using this for long lists—one sentence and two bullets is easier to read than three sentences.
- **Use clear headlines and subheads.** Questions, especially those with pronouns, are particularly effective.

- Use white space. Using white space allows you to reduce noise by visually separate information.

Making headlines rock

How important is the headline of your piece of web writing? Simply put, very important! As the headline is the first, and sometimes only impression you will make on a prospective customer, it's important to get this right! Some reports suggest that 80% of whether people open an email communication for example, is the nature of the subject header.

EXERCISE:

Consider these two headlines for the same body content and which one would grab your attention in an overflowing inbox:

- a) Winter newsletter from The Training Collective**
- b) 5 things you must know about social media this winter!**

Here's a list of headlines which are known for being engaging and which should get your creative juices going:

- How to headlines – How to write a killer 'how to' article that builds raving fans for your business
- Question headlines – Is Paleo or Vegan better for your health?
- Why headlines – Why blogging is the answer to getting more website traffic
- Fame headlines – 20 famous people with a secret in their closet
- Secrets headlines – The secret ingredient that makes your customers want to buy from you
- Mistakes headlines – 7 mistakes every new business owner makes and how to avoid them
- Lies headlines – Lies teenagers tell and how to recognise them
- Protection headlines – How to protect your garden from pests without harsh chemicals
- Solutions headlines – 10 free solutions to boost your website security
- Quick and easy – Quick and easy recipes that toddlers love
- Lists – The top 20 WordPress themes of 2015
- Blueprints – How to create the perfect outdoor space – your downloadable blueprint

[Check out this article on "how to write damn good headlines"](#)

[Test your headline for emotional impact](#)

EXERCISE: Write out 5 potential headlines that you could use as social posts or as the header of blog posts or a press release as part of your digital marketing campaign.

CREATIVE WAYS TO GET WRITING FOR THE WEB

As we outlined on the Week 2 webinar, if you're not a writer, or you're finding you just don't have the time to write the copy you need for your digital marketing campaign, don't despair, there are options available to you. These include:

- Voice memo – Use the voice memo function on your mobile phone and dictate the copy you feel you need to get out, then share it with a capable editor/sales copy whizz to turn into something magical.
- Dragon Dictation – Similarly this nifty app can take your words and turn them into copy for you to use.
- <https://www.speechpad.com/> - Need a transcriber? For only \$1 a minute this online service can help.
- Our sister company The Creative Collective offers copywriting services on a per hour or project basis, depending on the scope of the job. Get in touch with them at www.thecreativecollective.com.au
- Contractor: Could you source someone to upload the content for you on a periodic basis i.e. monthly/quarterly or as a one off project. Go searching on LinkedIn or post on your social networks or in relevant social network groups seeking someone with these skills.
- Outsource it to someone using an online site like Freelancer.com, guru.com, eLance.com. However do your due diligence well.
- Get a work experience student or intern – Many universities and TAFEs have students who need to get some work experience under their belt, or complete a set period internship (generally 10 – 12 weeks). Some have excellent communication skills (while others don't!) Check their work carefully and have a plan B.

What to do when you have writer's block

It happens to the best of us. You sit down to do a bunch of copywriting, have a looming deadline in front of you, and the words just won't come.

For those times where you need quality content ideas, go to Portent and use the [Portent Content Idea Generator](#). This tool provides a dual purpose that savvy content marketers and writers should appreciate.

You can gain content ideas from entering and subject in the tool's search field. From there you'll receive a ton of ideas for not only content to create but also titles to use for the blog article you're writing.

Use it to come up with an array of titles for your next blog post or presentation. Some are funny. Some are shocking. All are useful. Caution: It's addictive.

CONCLUSION

We've now taken you through a range of considerations when it comes to writing for the web. As always, there's probably a lot more to it than you ever realised. To conclude, here is a checklist of how to self-evaluate how effective your web writing is for any given body of copy:

- Can the user find the content?
- Will the content appeal to the target persona?
- Does the content have a relevant and eye-catching image with it?
- Does the content have an attention grabbing headline?
- Can the user read the content? (an inverted-pyramid writing style, content chunking through headlines, bullets, numbered lists etc).
- Can the user understand the content? (an appropriate content type (text, video), indication that you considered the user's' persona, context, respect for the users' reading level, articulating an old idea in a new way)
- Will the user want to take action? (a place to comment, an invitation to share, links to related content, a direct summary of what to do)
- Will the user share the content? (something to provoke an emotional response, a reason to share, a request to share, an easy way to share, personalization.)