

# Writing for your audience

According to Netflix, the British/BBC series Gavin and Stacey garners four and a half stars. This is why I added it to my queue. But I watched the first season (all on one DVD) and I rated the thing two stars. (Quick plot explanation: Gavin, who lives in Essex, and Stacey, who lives in Wales, meet over the phone and decide to meet in person after six months. They fall in love. Meanwhile, they each have a best friend: Smithy for Gavin and Nessa for Stacey, who also get involved.)

I have no doubt that many people find Gavin and Stacey hilarious. In fact, some of the acting is very good, and some of the situations are painfully relevant. However, it is clear that the intended audience is British. For instance, the whole Wales is another country joke. In the United States, we would be hard pressed to find Wales on the map of the UK, and for the British, Wales is quite literally another country (just like Scotland). There is rivalry between them, and there is some kind of joke on how the Londoners can't understand what the Welsh are saying. OK, I get it, but I don't really get it in the way a British person would.

And then, there is the culture of a place. Apparently, smoking is still a normal thing to do in Britain. There is smoking indoors and out, by everyone. In the U.S., we have steered away from showing this much smoking, and I don't think I have seen much on TV. In Britain, the culture is OK with smoking. To me, it is jarring (and adds nothing to the plot).

In short, I didn't find Gavin and Stacey quite as amusing as if I had been British. That is because the series is written by the British for the British. Yes, some things are universal (weird in-laws, weird friends, not wanting to reveal secrets), which is why we can watch programs from different countries and get it. Humor though, is harder to convey.

The bottom line is that you write for your audience. To do this, you must understand who your audience is and what makes them tick. We define audiences in all sorts of ways: demographically, geographically and so on. Case in point: you would not write an ad directed to a 65 plus demographic using teen slang. It just wouldn't make sense.

Understand your audience and tailor your word choice and message to their needs and sensibilities.

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## The defense of newspapers

It was a matter of time, I suppose. The newspaper industry has finally woken up and realized it needs to defend itself. It is as if the newspapers industry decided to say to the world, much like Mark Twain did, the rumors of my death are greatly exaggerated.

Today (which is Memorial Day), buried in the Style section of the Washington Post (which makes me wonder) is a half-page ad entitled: The Reality About Newspapers, paid for by the Arlington, VA-based Newspaper Association of America. The ad attempts to defend the viability of newspapers. It proposes to set the record straight about the following "myths:"

1. No one reads newspapers (they say more than 104 million people read every day –in the US? Worldwide?)
2. Young people don't read newspapers (they say 61 percent of 18-24 year olds read a paper or visit a newspaper website)
3. Newspaper readership is tanking (They say newspaper

readership declined a “mere 1.8% compared to 10% decline in prime time TV viewership)

4. Many newspapers are going out of business (they say newspapers remain profitable????)
5. Newspaper advertising doesn't work (Google research says 56% of consumers researched product that they saw in a newspaper)
6. No creative options in newspapers (says who?)
7. If newspapers close, you will still be able to get news from other sources (newspapers are the premiere source of journalism—no quibble there)

The ad concludes with the idea that the newspaper industry is transforming itself, and invites you to visit [www.newspapermedia.com](http://www.newspapermedia.com).

I am not sure that these are all “myths,” or that they are widely held, and I am not sure the ad did a good job of refuting them. The facts don't all add up and they don't clarify who is reading newspapers and where. Additionally, the placement day and place within the newspaper makes it highly unlikely that many people will see this. Besides, isn't printing an ad about defending newspapers in the newspaper preaching to the choir?

It was time to hear the newspaper side of the story. But the facts are there: several newspapers have closed their doors in the past few months and many are seeing falling ad revenues and decreasing readership. If the Newspaper Association wants to salvage its industry it must do a better, more clever job of getting its message across. This may be one of the lamest ads I have ever read, and I read a newspaper every day!!!!



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# Marketing professional associations

There are hundreds of professional associations, representing every imaginable industry and career path. There is even an association for associations (or at least for association executives): ASAE. The ASAE has been advertising itself on TV lately, something I have never seen before. It is doing it mostly on Sunday morning talk shows, and the campaign is called the Power of A.

Associations, like other donor or member-based organizations, have to work to maintain the number of donors or members. A drop is serious, as it means a cut in income. At the same time, these associations or organizations have to work extra hard to entice people to join.

In the last few weeks, several associations I could be a member of because of my profession, have been having membership drives. They are offering one or more of the following:

- Reduced membership costs
- Gifts with membership
- Waived application fees

Do these enticements work? I think the one that works the best is reduced membership costs, **IF** there is sufficient benefit to joining. And therein lies the problem. Often, these associations have events that are open to the public. Non-members pay more than members. If you like what you see, and you want to go to more events, perhaps membership is worth it, in pure cash value. However, you can still go when you want even if you aren't a member. But what else does membership offer? What exclusive, member-only benefits does the association offer? What can you get nowhere else?

In some cases, people want the “cachet” of being a member. Or they want the opportunity to network, or raise their leadership profile by serving on committees and boards. All these are valid reasons to join. Being an association member shows that you are really interested in/committed to the field.

Another issue is that there may be several associations representing your field. Which do you choose? In my case, I could be in the American Marketing Association, Public Relations Society of America, International Association of Business Communicators, the Association for Women in Communications, and so forth. For me, the problem is the cost of joining is not subsidized by an employer, since I work for myself. I have to choose carefully. And yes, the money incentive works. Making it more affordable to join is an incentive.

Bottom line is memberships have to do with cost and value. Providing sufficient value for members makes membership worthwhile.

What makes you join an association? Is it worth it?



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## **Blogs, comments and marketing**

OK, not quite as sexy as Sex, Lies and Videotape...

Lately, I have been reading/hearing a lot about comments on blogs. Most people seem to favor comments. One of the ways we know that people are responding or finding what we write interesting and worthwhile is when we get comments. It is also a way to know what our audience is thinking. Others are not

so keen on allowing comments because there might be some negative or disparaging statements, and opening up you/your organization to what the public thinks.

Clearly, some organizations are more likely to want to know how the audience thinks and some are not so inclined. **I would counsel those who want to remain hermetic not to have a blog. A blog, almost by definition, is a forum (it can be internal, but nevertheless it is about exchange of ideas).**

Those who are OK with audience interaction should probably have guidelines to govern the comments. In fact, you don't HAVE to publish each and every comment if you don't want. Right here on Caffeinated we've received some fairly self-serving comments along with some out of left field observations that we have decided to let live in the netherworld.

Courtland Milloy, a columnist at the *Washington Post*, has a piece in today's paper about nasty/ignorant/vicious comments. He wants readers to tone down the invective. I agree with him—I have followed some comment streams on opinion pieces and people give wind to the most disagreeable thoughts. And Milloy argues that even though these commenters are counted as visitors to the site, some advertisers may not want to be associated with them. Is this true? I am not sure that advertisers/marketers look at comments other than as a numbers game. We all know that there are some kooky people out there who are bored/irritated/deranged and take it out on comments boards. **What we endorse as marketers is the content on the site, not the comments.**

**As marcomm folks, what we need to worry about is our policy for comments.** I don't think you should discourage comments, but you should make clear that not everything is fair play and that not every utterance will see the light of the blogosphere. You may want to set this out in a terms and conditions somewhere on your blog.

David Griner, in his blog, The Social Path, has had a series of articles on comments. It is worthwhile to read this one, about whether you are LEGALLY liable for comments made on your blog. As I point out above, this type of concern should be part of the policies that govern your site, and something you must consider if you do have a blog.

Your thoughts? Comment, but please no racist, slanderous, sexist remarks!

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## Words are Key

Keywords. They are the mantra of the Search Engine Optimization (SEO) people. Some websites are written in a weird, keyword heavy format to make them seem like candy for the search engines. Websites also have metatags and alt-text and other areas for keywords. Search engines read text, which is why content is king on the Internet. Search engines do not read images, unless they are labeled or tagged.

Some companies set up blogs just to increase their likelihood of being found. And SEO people think you should have keywords there too.

If you ever doubted that keywords are important, then do a little experiment on Twitter. Use a keyword like marketing, writing, or golf (if that is your thing) and see how many people start following you. Yesterday, I re-tweeted a story about the Christian Science Monitor getting rid of its religion reporter (fairly ironic, and that is why I shared it). Guess what, no less than three people of a heavy

Christian persuasion started following me. Even though none of my posts and my bio say anything about Christianity. These people were simply keyword surfing and leeching on to the word Christian in Christian Science Monitor.

So, how do you create a list of keywords? Easy. Start with your industry and work from there. Say you are a civil engineer. You would have the following: engineering, civil engineering, building, and so on. The important thing is to think of variations and related words. If you are in advertising, you would naturally choose marketing, and perhaps sales. You may also want to include location (city, state, country) and specialties. You may want to use the names of your principals. **Just ask yourself: what would people ask if they needed to find me or someone that does what I do?**

Final thought: a popular word on this blog has been Twitter. In fact, I am sure if I tagged this article with the word Twitter, I will get plenty of search engine hits.



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## Communicating with GenY

UPDATE: A GenY blogger, Josh Groth made some great comments. (His blog is <http://echodemic.blogspot.com/>) Please read them in the comment section. But some stuff he pointed out is that GenY uses email for business communications and Facebook for personal use. They look stuff up on Wikipedia when they don't understand something. And they subscribe to magazines. I would love more input from anybody else out there who is a GenY person.

Full disclosure: I am a member of Generation X. I have been

“fortunate” to meet many members of GenY and have come across some universal behavior that impact communications with this young group of people.

**GenY loves to text.** In fact, if you want a GenYer to respond to you, you should send a text first. Do not call and do not email.

**GenY loves Facebook.** Well, so do many other people, but GenY is the first generation to adopt Facebook, and it could be argued, it was designed for them.

**GenY does not read printed materials** as in a daily newspaper. Online baby! Yes, they read the Washington Post/NY Times/LA Times, but ONLINE only. I would venture to guess that the subscription level among this group for printed newspaper hovers near 0%.

Other things to bear in mind when communicating with a 20-something:

Frame of reference. They are not historically minded and will not get a reference to Ronald Reagan or LP records or anything that happened prior to 1990.

They tend to be conflict-averse. GenY has been brought up to get along well with others (thanks to Rodney King and other influencers). If they don't like you (your product, your service) they won't argue or discuss, they will IGNORE. You probably won't get much feedback unless you ask them nicely. Via text.

Their social mores are more fluid than previous generations. They aren't easily shocked.

Any other tips for communicating with GenY? Please comment.



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# Print or online?

If you are a media buyer, and you are given the choice of only the online edition or the print edition of your local daily newspaper, which do you choose? Kind of a tricky question, right?

Last week, I attended a panel on business news and media, specifically tailored for public relations people. One of the panelists was the tech writer at the Washington Post. He told us how his column on personal tech runs in the paper on Sunday but is posted online on Friday. When I heard this I thought that the Post is cannibalizing itself. After all, if you can get the exact same content plus links and commentaries, online, why ever would you subscribe to the Post? (Note to self: think about whether I should cancel Post subscription).

But, apparently, the two editions (print and online) have different audiences. Most people who exclusively read online NEVER read the print edition, and those who read the print edition will only go to the online version when they want more information. This is what came out of a survey of the attendees to this panel (put on by the Washington Network Group Communications Roundtable).

What online offers that print does not is a multimedia experience, plus more (more info, links, comments, blogs). Online is also more current, updated frequently and that is what people expect.

Another panelist, the editor for the Washington Business Journal, said that they do have different content online than on the print edition, and it is more updated. However, they just started a blog, get this, TWO WEEKS ago. But WBJ may

have an older base, who still wants the print edition and may not even visit the online edition.

Bottom line to answer the question is this: is the online version better than the print version? And, what is your core target audience? If the online version is better, and has a better readership, certainly buy online only. If the online version is a skeleton version of the print, buy the print. And ultimately, look at the audience numbers. You want to buy where most of your audience is.

Your thoughts and experiences welcome!



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## How to: Develop a tagline

Does your business have a tagline? If yes, does it accurately convey what you do? If not, why not?

Every business should have a tagline, no doubt. **A tagline is an additional bit of information that clarifies what you do to your potential customers.** Now, a tagline is not a motto. Webster's defines a motto as "a short expression of a guiding principle." A motto could be something generic, like "we always do our best," which can be seen as something your employees rally around but that does not communicate anything about what your business does.

**What is a slogan?** Webster's gives three definitions: 1) a war cry; 2) phrase used to express a characteristic position or goal; 3) attention-getting phrase used in promotion. Clearly definition number 1 is not what we are after. And the difference between two and three is really the difference between a slogan and a tagline. A slogan should be unchanging,

something that is more universal (your goals or your purpose) and your tagline can change for a particular ad campaign. And yes, a slogan and a tagline can be one and the same.

For instance, if you are a hospital or clinic, your slogan might be your commitment to a healthy future for all. If you are running an ad campaign, you might focus on a certain aspect of your practice like cardiology and your tagline might focus on helping patients achieve heart health. All the while your motto could be something about maintaining the highest standard in hygienic practices.

So, how do you develop a tagline? First make sure you are not developing a motto. Be more specific about what you are trying to communicate about your product or service.

Steps:

1) **Understand your product or service and its USP.** This seems fairly obvious but you would be surprised at how very few people can communicate succinctly what they do. You might start with a short description of your product and service. Think about attributes, descriptors and differentiators

2) **Brainstorm.** Write out 10-20 short lines (5-10 words) about your product or service. Incorporate some descriptors and attributes from above.

3) **Evaluate.** Which is catchy? Which is comprehensive? Which is too generic? Eliminate anything that is cliché, generic, or just doesn't say enough.

4) **Narrow down your list** to 3-5 choices and show them to your principal stakeholders.

5) Have a **vote.** Generally, one tagline will emerge as the best one.

One more thing. People often confuse logo and slogan. A logo is a GRAPHIC representation of your slogan/motto. A logo is

never a written piece. And logos are best left to design professionals. I would strongly counsel you to not try doing this at home!



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## What we can learn from spam

Nothing in the online universe is more annoying than spam. This past week, my email host was not working properly and a lot of spam got through. As I was busy deleting unwanted email, I got to thinking about what spammers do that works and what they do that doesn't.

What works:

- 1) Spammers know exactly what they are selling (online drugs, weight loss promises and other items).
- 2) Identifying the keywords associated with their product and focus on those words.
- 3) Trying again and again.
- 4) Using official-looking return addresses to look legitimate
- 5) Personalizing emails (which is scary but effective)

What does not work

- 1) Typos and spelling/grammar mistakes in the subject line
- 2) Using foul language
- 3) Not targeting

Most spam does a bit of both these lists, which is why,

ultimately, many of us don't open this junk. You may wonder why they keep trying. Simple: it costs next to nothing to send these emails out. And there are always people looking for a fix, so someone must click on these emails.

Do you open spam? Do you report spam? Have you ever seen a great spam subject line? If you have, let me know in the comments.



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## It's all about appearance

We judge people by their appearance

Have you heard about the latest YouTube sensation? Apparently, on the show "Britain's Got Talent," a woman who is not a) young; b) thin or c) beautiful wowed the judges, because, get this, she can sing. The show is about talent, and yet the woman was pre-judged on her appearance.

While I think that judging talent by appearance is not wise, it remains part of how the world operates. We do judge the book by its cover. What does this mean for your marketing?

Evaluate what people are seeing about you: website, brochure, business cards, etc. Will people think you have less talent because your website is outdated or your cards have typos?

Are you projecting what you want people to think? I have written before about this, but if you have a dated look (a website designed in the 90s) are people going to think you are "with it?" If you are a graphic designer and you have no samples on your website, what does that say?

Appearance is easy to fix. Talent/quality is a lot harder.