

Answer these basic questions

I was watching the midday news today. We had a lot of rain overnight and there was flooding in some areas. Apparently, there was even flooding in Rockville, where I live. A reporter was out somewhere in Rockville telling about how a car got stuck in a flooded road. Except she never said where in Rockville this road was located. And that's what I really wanted (needed) to know: **where exactly** is it flooded so I can avoid the area.

Perhaps this reporter has forgotten her Journalism 101 class, which teaches that every story should answer these questions:

Who?

What?

Where?

Why?

When?

How?

In fact, the answers to these basic questions are the basis for any story, whether told by a reporter on TV or a public relations practitioner in a press release or a website copywriter. To answer those questions means to tell the most important part of any story. Everything else is additional detail and description that can make a story more compelling or interesting.

And yet, how many press releases are missing answers to these questions? How many websites don't answer the why or the how of whatever product or service they are promoting?

If you want to succeed at storytelling and content marketing,

you must answer each and every one of these questions. If you can't, you need more information. If you won't, you are probably trying to hide something or you didn't do your homework.

Need to tell the complete story in your marketing materials? Contact me to see how we can work together to get beyond the basics.

What not to do on your blog

If you ever watched the TLC show What Not to Wear, you know some people choose to wear cringe-inducing outfits when left to their own devices. It generally takes an ambush by the show's hosts, disapproval of the person's loved ones, and a look in the three-way mirror for the fashion-challenged individual to consider changing his/her look. In other words, sometimes you need an outside perspective.



What? by Judith (judepics) on Flickr

Here's my outside perspective on what you should not be doing on your blog:

Pulling a bait and switch. You tell readers you have five tips for doing something but in reality you want them to buy your e-book or webinar. Not cool.

Selling. You can funnel your readers to something you are selling, *after* you have given them value. In other words, your blog post is not advertising copy.

Letting down your readers. If your headline promises the ten best ways to do something, then you should deliver those ten tips.

Making readers cringe at your inability to use spell-check (or understand grammar). We all make mistakes, and we all forgive

one or two typos and grammatical slip-ups, but there's a limit.

Not understanding how people read on the web (or on mobile). Your post consists of a single paragraph, no breaks, no bolding, no graphics, no bullet points, nothing. And it is really long. The web makes people *scan* content (so make your content scannable!).

Closing off comments. Why be social if you don't want people to interact with you? You can and should have a comment policy, and you don't have to approve every comment, but do have a way for people to interact with your blog post.

Being jargon and buzzword crazy. Few things make me want to scream as much as a blog post filled to the brim with buzzy phrases and cliched jargon ("try to find your sweet spot by selling the c-suite on the low hanging fruit...").

What would you add? Tell me in the comments, which I moderate but always check and respond to!

*Want to have an effective blog? Attend the next **How to Write Your Blog** workshop on November 12 in Washington, DC. Get more details and register today! Early registration prices available until Friday.*

Top blogging lessons from WordPress Camp Baltimore 2013

What did I do this past Saturday? I attended WordPress Camp Baltimore for the second time. I think that if you blog

regularly and/or help people set up blogs, you should most definitely attend this volunteer-run event, available worldwide probably at a city near you. It is well worth the low cost of admission. If you want to find one near you, check out the WordPress camp site.



WordPress Camp
Baltimore 2013

I attended five sessions out of the total of 15. There were two tracks: one directed to the developers and one to users. Obviously, what I learned would be more useful to a user than a developer.

Social media must be integrated into both your actual blog and your blog's strategy

- Google + indexes faster, so consider setting up your Google + authorship description
- You need both inbound and outbound social media plugins
- Check out the Tweet Old Post plugin to be able to use your older blog posts
- Be careful with sending people to social networks—the last thing you want to do is lead someone away from your site.

SEO keeps changing but there are several things you can do to keep your site visible

- Use the WordPress SEO by Yoast plugin—highly recommended by tons of people
- Name all your images
- Do not ever write “click here.” Write a description.
- Organize your content well—Google likes organized websites—using headings, etc.
- Optimize your site so users like it
- Include rich content—pics, graphs, videos
- Watch your page speed (you may need to cache you website using plugins like WP Super Cache)
- Install and submit a site map using the Google XML Sitemap plugin

Producing your own podcast is not that hard

- What you need to produce a podcast is: a blog, hosting that provides enough bandwidth, artwork/branding materials and a podcast feed. You will also need a microphone and a way to edit your audio.
- Use editors like Audacity.
- Look into podcasting plugins like PodPress and PowerPress

Blogs and WordPress sites make content marketing easier

- Content marketing’s purpose is to drive profitable (however you define it) customer action.
- Content marketing is about providing relevant, valuable (educational) and enjoyable material for your audience/user
- Remember that customers care about themselves not you
- Keyword research is key (you must know what keywords your customers would use to find your service/product)
- When you provide valuable content, the reader/user is

bound by the need to reciprocate since humans have a deep seated need to return favors.

- Remember that information that is exclusive is more persuasive (this is only available for a limited time)
- Humans are more receptive to requests from people who appear to be authorities or experts.
- Read Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion by Robert Cialdini

Thanks to the following presenters:

- AkilahThompkins-Robinson
- Byron Warnken
- Arsham and Josh from Webmechanix
- Douglas Bell
- Shane Powers

5 keys to successful content marketing

Yesterday, the PRSA-National Capital Chapter hosted a panel on content marketing and public relations. The panelists—Michael Laxineta (Custom Briefings), Bruce Namerow (Interactive Strategies) and Anne Holtz (Home Innovation Research Labs)—did a great job of explaining what content marketing is, how it works and how to make it work better.

Michael Laxineta said he believes that the “PR profession is the original content marketer.” He says that 91% of business-to-business marketers are using content marketing, and that the biggest challenge is providing engaging content. Bruce

Namerow said that content drives anything, and that brands now are their own publishers.

Content marketing has many benefits, including brand awareness, nurturing leads and building relationships. Anne Holtz said that prior to embarking on a content marketing strategy, Home Innovation Research Labs was doing great stuff, but people did not know about it. Having a strategy in place has helped get traffic to its website.

In order to develop a successful content marketing program, you should consider these five key steps:

- 1. Make sure that your content marketing is in line with both your business and communications goals.**
- 2. Understand exactly who your audience is and what information they need.**
- 3. Do keyword research so that you are using the terms and keywords people actually search.**
- 4. Personalize the content to your audience needs. It is not about reaching everyone but about reaching your niche with the information they need.**
- 5. Make sure your content is mobile-ready.**

Perhaps content marketing is just a fancy new term for what we used to call integrated marketing communications, as my friend Karen Addis from Environics Communications said. Whatever we call it now, it is still smart to reach your audience with the information they require to build a relationship with your organization or to buy from your business.