Write to be read: The art of SEO

Any child with a pen and paper can write. It's an entirely different animal to write with a reader in mind.

It is easy to write, hard to write something readable, and infinitesimally more difficult to write a piece that actually will get read. This is where search engine optimization (SEO) comes in.

SEO makes it easy for readers to find you. It puts your website in front of anyone who is looking for anything relevant to your business. If you have competition, SEO is crucial to becoming the leading brand in consumer minds. Whatever people see *first* is going to be what stands out in their minds.

237 Marketing + Web believes in best practices when it comes to SEO writing. Here are some of the most useful tips on title, description and content that we'd like to share.

Title: This is what a user first sees, and what they click to get to your page. Use at least four words and include key words relevant to your page. If you have space, include your company's name after the page title to increase brand recognition.

Description: This is the text that shows up underneath your page title in a search. As with the title, it's crucial to include a keyword to encourage click throughs, so that the viewer knows they've found something relevant to their search. The description should not exceed 165 characters to ensure the entire description is visible in a search result.

Body: The essence of the page. All the content that you're trying to get people to see is in the body. Include photographs, both external and internal links, and make sure your content is original. Try to write more than 400 words to fully describe your idea and make sure your keyword is included. Alt text is also an important tool for SEO. When you scroll over an image, alt text is the description that shows up. This is also an important tool for the visually impaired, who have software that reads alt text when they cannot see the pictures.

And of course, it's always good to ask for help! Email the 237 Marketing + Web team today to learn more.

Brand your website

Your website is your online space. It contains who you are, what you do and holds your company's image. A website speaks on behalf of a company when no one is available, and it speaks 24/7.

DO

Use colors purposefully. Make your colors consistent with your logo. Consider the color of links before being clicked, after being clicked, and while the mouse is hovering over the link.

Consider font. Make your fonts consistent throughout your brand. That means your logo, website headlines and body text, and text on any printed materials.

Focus on navigation. Include a menu and a way to reach your homepage from every page to make your website easy to navigate. Also include your contact information, or a way to reach it, on every page.

Increase readability. Improve readability making text large enough to read and increasing space between lines and paragraphs. Additionally, put dark text on light background, or light text on dark background.

Double-check. Test all your links, make sure your formatting is uniform, and edit your content. Check your URLs. Are they professional, or did you forget to change it from www.testingnewwebsite.com?

Consider the user experience (and their screens). Limit page length to two screenfuls, and articles to six in order to avoid users losing their place in an endless list of information. Page content should also be limited to 1200 pixels or less horizontally so that text doesn't go off the screen.

DON'T

Confuse. Avoid website restructures and changes.

Blind. Avoid animations, scrolling text or flashing lights. It will make your website look "cheap" and like a giant online advertisement. It also makes it hard to find content when every inch of your website is trying to get a visitor's attention.

Underestimate impatience. Compress your images for web resolution and avoid image backgrounds. Text will be harder to read over it, and the page will take longer to load. The longer a page takes to load, the more people grow impatient and exit the page.

Go click-crazy. Make it easy for people to reach relevant information in a few clicks. The more clicks it takes for someone to reach the page they want, the more likely they are to lose interest.

BE TOO EXCITED!!! Don't make more than a few words in all caps, and limit yourself to one exclamation point.

Flood browsers. Open external links in a new window in order to keep users on your site in at least one place, but don't open internal links in new windows.

Want help with your website? Email 237webcare@237marketingandweb.com

Five Focus Group Suggestions

Focus group results have numerous degrees of reliability depending on countless variables. 237 Marketing + Web offers suggestions on how to hold a focus group and get authentic, reliable results that your company can depend on.

Have someone outside of your company facilitate the discussion

Focus group results are more credible when a neutral party asks the questions. Participants are highly aware of who is asking, and may tailor answers if they think their opinions may offend someone. By having a neutral party facilitate the focus group, anonymity of the participants can be ensured and honest answers can be attained.

Define your focus group invitees

The point of a focus group is to get the opinions of a certain demographic. You must ask the right questions or risk getting opinions that your company does not need. For example, what is their level of familiarity with your company? Are they current clients, do they have minimal awareness of your brand or are they completely unaware of your brand?

Understand the double-edge of incentivizing

Incentives are necessary for participation and getting ideal group participants. However, incentives also impact attitude. If possible, do not reveal the amount of a monetary incentive until after the focus group is over.

Do not educate the participants while they are participating

If there is a popular, incorrect opinion going around the table, let it circulate. Record the responses and recognize that what people *don't* know about a company is as important as what they think. It's also useful to see how that lack of knowledge then drives opinion.

Allow participants to interact with each other

Encouraging discussion is what a focus group thrives on. Discussion between participants can lead to deviation from the focus group outline, which can yield answers to a question no one knew had to be asked.

Interested in learning more? Read about how 237 Marketing + Web facilitated a focus group in our [portfolio](#).

Know your target audience

Understanding your target audience is important for campaign effectiveness and cost-efficiency. You can't please everyone, but if you market to 1,000 individuals in your properly defined target audience, the benefits will be greater than marketing to 10,000 random individuals.

Your target audience should be narrowly defined in order to tailor your efforts and avoid confusion, especially for a large company with top-down management. For example, if your target market is defined as "female," you are including anyone from a little girl to an 80-year-old woman.

Here are some questions to help get a clearer picture your target audience.

- What industry does your target audience work in?
- What is the household size and income of your target audience?
- What is the level of education of your target audience?
- What gender is your target audience?
- How old is your target audience?
- Where is your target audience located geographically?
- Where did your target audience study?
- Where does your target audience hang out?
- Whom is your competition targeting?

Once these questions have been answered, further research can be made into target audiences using…

- Focus groups: Ask non-leading questions to discover perception of your brand, or psychographics of your target audience.
- Surveys: Simple surveys are great ways to gather information, especially if you have a list of contacts handy. Surveys can also be conducted on social media networks, so you can target participants based on which companies they like or follow. In order to improve participation, incentives such as a raffle entry, gift card or special discount can be offered to everyone who completes the survey.
- Social media: Scour Facebook and Twitter to see who is talking about you and their other interests. Investigate trends to learn more about your audience's lifestyles, values and beliefs. Social monitoring can also lead you to consumers who can be contacted for valuable opinions. Ask questions, send surveys, Tweet at them or leave a wall post.

Understanding your target market doesn't mean excluding all other markets, but it will give you direction with your communication efforts. Once you know your target audience, create marketing campaigns that will excite them. Ultimately, you are trying to connect with new customers and reconnect with repeat customers.

What? A double space is more than just paragraph spacing?

Double spaces aren't just a page filler technique used by college students to fulfill a minimum page count. Double spacing means placing two spaces after punctuation marks. Like so. Do you notice the difference?

It's common belief that double spacing began with typewriters and their [monospace type](). Although partially true, double spacing actually [originates]() from a long [history of inconsistent spacing]() after punctuation. Two spaces after a period were widely used to emphasize the ending of a sentence. However, most fonts now provide enough space between punctuation marks and your next sentence so that the double spacing practice has become obsolete and a waste of real estate.

According to [Slate](), "adding two spaces after a period no longer enhances readability … It diminishes it."

[237 Marketing + Web]() is on the war path to eliminate double spaces. Computers are designed to space each character appropriately, so that a "W" isn't squished into the same space as an "i." Because it is unnecessary, the use of double spacing will also likely be seen as unawareness of the issue and an outdated understanding of grammar. It's an editor's nightmare.

So, from all of us on the 237 team (especially the ones in charge of copy and SEO) please stop using double spaces in your written life. It's good for your readers and it's good for you.

Improve your blog readability

"Readability" means the ease with which text (and your ideas) can be understood. Here are a few tips to keep your blog posts readable.

Limit your post to 300 – 700 words. Attention spans on the Internet are notoriously short compared to print and other forms of traditional media. Although you can have a few longer posts, the majority of your articles should be less than 1,000 words. If you need more words than that, you have enough material for two articles.

Use simple language. You are not writing an English literature essay for a professor. Use easy words and simple sentence structure.

Break up ideas into short paragraphs. Each idea should have its own distinctive area—a paragraph. This writing technique will keep ideas clear, separated and easy to read.

Speak directly to your reader. Write your article as if you are talking to a friend. If you speak to your reader through your article, you engage them and usually retain more focus.

Talk about what you know. Write what you know is obvious advice. People write best when they understand the topic. But what if you need to write about something you know nothing about? *Research*. The Internet is your friend.

Give clear instructions. Telling someone to update his or her smart phone applications every month is an instruction. Giving someone directions such as "press the grey button in the bottom-left corner twice" is usually much more appreciated.

Emphasize benefits. Make your post valuable to your readers. Fill it with useful information that will achieve desired results and keep them reading.

Finally, **enjoy your writing**. If you do not think your articles are important, it will reflect in your writing. Insert a little humor into your posts and have fun with them!

What do you *really* want on your website?

A short guide to some WordPress features

WordPress (.org, especially) is so customizable that you can have virtually anything on your website (pun slightly intended). WordPress supports shopping carts, catalogs, homepage slide shows, a wealth of widgets and areas to place them, and more.

But what features do you really need? Some features that we intentionally choose for one website, we would never even think of including on the next. For example, we wouldn't put a blog in a catalog website (a site where people can browse items in your shop. Ex. [H&M for Canada](#) doesn't allow purchases, but shows clothing and prices). Some features are great for achieving one objective, but can be useless or detrimental for another objective. It all depends on what you want your site to be.

Here are some of the pros and cons of our frequently used and requested features.

Blog

Before inserting a blog into your website, be sure that someone is responsible for updating it. Many small businesses include blogs on their websites to show a personal touch, but if they don't have the man-power to keep it current, interesting and relevant, the blog becomes obsolete. It makes the website look neglected and dated. Information-driven businesses may also have blogs to show expertise in their trade, such as a tutoring service keeping a blog on good studying habits and tutoring tips.

Social media feed

It is always a good idea to link your website to your social media sites and vice versa. Usually, websites have social media logos at the bottom of their homepage that link to their social media profiles. However, a website can also have a live feed of tweets in a sidebar or [widget](#). If you have a portfolio website, it may be a good idea to show off some of your professional tweeting skills. If you are creating a directory website, you want viewers to focus on the directory information, not your personal tweets.

Catalog vs. shopping cart

This option all depends on whether your company is selling materials, and how. If you are a retail store, a shopping cart offers customers an easy and convenient way to browse and purchase your items. If you only sell in-store, it is still a good idea to have a catalog on your website with prices and descriptions listed so that viewers know whether you have something they want. It goes without saying that this must be kept updated as well.

Homepage slideshow and graphics

A homepage slideshow is a great way to brand your website. If you have the right graphic designer or photographer, you can influence potential customers from the very first time they lay eyes on your website. Photographs and graphics on a homepage are especially useful for retail websites, since it's an easy way to feature items. As with the other features, making sure your images are current and relevant is a must.

The low-down on a list of WordPress features is readily available as part of 237 WebCare. Ask us about it!

YOU can write a great blog post!

Blogs, properly used, are a great way to add value to your website. They can be interactive, informative and gain new clients and influencers over to your brand. Because of their benefits, it's important that you craft your blog posts to attract readers and leave an impression.

Entice readers with a good title

The title of your post will be what the reader sees first. It's prominent information in a search, making it important to include key words to improve click-through. Make your title relevant so it's clear what your article is about. Try to limit your title to 72 characters so the entire title is visible in a search.

Include an interesting hook

A hook is unique, relatable and encourages people to read more. It's the very first sentence of your post and should lead readers into your article. An interesting hook for an article about choosing the right pair of jeans, for example, could be "Most of us hate wearing pants, but if you choose them correctly, a pair of jeans can be just as comfortable as boxer shorts."

A hook needs to be interesting, even if the content of the article is a simple informational press release. An interesting hook for an article about a coffee shop opening next door could be "Because Oregon is in desperate need of more coffee shops, Caffeine For Your Thoughts has opened up in McMinnville and consequently saved us all from a coffee drought."

Feature useful information

All articles must have a purpose. If you don't have a purpose for writing an article, don't write it. All good articles perform a function, whether it is to inform, humor or inspire. Be sure you understand exactly why you are writing your article, keeping in mind that your readers will be spending valuable time engaged in your writing. Don't waste their time.

Be concise

The key to online writing is concise, purposeful sentences organized in short paragraphs to communicate flowing ideas.

Don't be verbose:

The individual goes on to state that the psychology theory is incorrect due to the irresponsible methods of data collection and incomplete research and analysis of collected data. We used this study to justify the claim of harmful effects caused by marshmallows on humans.

This leaves your reader confused and he or she will stop reading.

Do be concise:

Simmons states that the psychology theory isn't reliable because of how the data was gathered. The study was conducted by the University of Connecticut and verified by our research team.

Your reader will continue reading because he or she understands what you're saying.

Engage with Images

Images keep a reader engaged and interested. Select high-quality images that are relevant, well-composed and will make sense to the reader. Resize the image so it to proportionate to the article length and place in an appropriate location. Be sure to attribute your images, include captions and always use an image title and alt text.

Educate with Links

Include links in your post to educate your reader about a topic that is reference but you don't have time to explain in your article. External links direct your the reader to other places on the Internet, and internal links connect your reader to information within your website. Links can also be used with [call to action](). For example, at the end of a blog post, say something like…

If you enjoyed this post, sign up for the 237 Newsletter! Stay informed and up-to-date on all of our writing, SEO and website tips and tricks.

Regular website maintenance

Why does your website need it?

Websites are your online brand. Your website is the voice of your company when you are unable to speak in person, so regular website maintenance is as important as maintaining your physical workplace—and possibly even more. Unless you own a store on every street, your website has the potential to reach more individuals than your stores do.

Here are a few things you should do once a month to ensure a healthy, appealing website that consistently reflects your brand.

Remain credible.

This means that, at the minimum, your website should be fully functional.

-Make sure your links all work

-Keep your software updated (ie. WordPress plugins)

Troubleshoot.

Try to catch errors before they occur, but if there is a problem, find it quickly.

Stay current.

Update your website regularly. Offer new content to give people reasons to come back.

-Use social media to provide new content

-Publish new blog posts, articles or newsworthy pieces

Ready to start taking care of your website?

[237 WebCare button]

Have you done a SWOT analysis of your company?

A common marketing practice when strategizing a company's next step is to perform a SWOT analysis. SWOT stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. Mapping SWOT out for your brand can help you plan your next campaign, methods of communication, and give you a better overall understanding of your business.

Strengths

- What are we doing right?
- What do our current customers like?
- What is necessary?
- Be sure not to lose your company's strengths in any campaign or communication.

Weaknesses

- What complaints have we gotten?
- Why do we lose customers?
- Is there an audience we desire but aren't reaching?
- Many weaknesses can be translated into opportunities.

Opportunities

- What can we capitalize on?
- What do we need to focus on?
- Is there a benefit our company offers that we aren't promoting enough?
- What can we improve?

Threats

- What other companies offer the same services nearby?
- What are some reasons current customers may switch from our company to a competitors?
- Are our competitors doing something better? Are they more innovative than us?
- Could we be making any mistakes internally/unknowingly?

If you need some assistance mapping out SWOT for your company, email us! If you've already answered the questions above and are ready to take the next step, see our marketing page; we can help.

Let's Make People Fall in Love with your Website

Websites are a wonderful thing. They disperse information and are a wonderful way to interact with new clients, curious consumers, and enthusiastic fans. Websites can also be incredibly fun if you are willing to invest a little time, innovation and energy into it.

After years of creating and maintaining more websites than we can count, we're listing a few things that our favorite websites do to make us love them.

- Offer something fun, surprise with something new. If your website has a something out of the ordinary, people will remember. We happen to have a secret page somewhere on the 237 website.

- Strive for interesting and informative content on your site. Give the viewer what he or she is looking for in a way that won't put them to sleep.

- Balance your images, colors and white space to keep computer or mobile screens lively and bustling.

- Make sure your website is mobile-responsive. Life is fast-paced and people want to access information on-the-go.

- Make it easy for your visitors to navigate and find what they want. The most recent 237 newsletter that went out was so well-received that one of our wonderful readers emailed back, saying she had so much fun with it she clicked on everything she could.

- Be uniquely branded, and believe in the essence of your company. Your fans are looking for your brand when they visit your website. White space is a wonderful thing, but if your brand calls for an overwhelming splatter of colors and shapes--go for it!

Social media tip of the day: Educate

A common "rule" for social media is to keep your messages to 20 percent self-promotion or specials and 80 percent quality information such as...

- Retweets or post shares (sharing others' ideas)
- News or recent happenings in the industry
- Graphs or infographics
- Images
- Testimonials
- Entertaining content

- Tips
- Business tools

If possible, we believe in focusing on the 80 percent. Turn the ratio into 99 percent education and 1 percent self-promotional. Continually educate your followers and they will continue to follow you. Limit yourself to 1 percent promotional content and you will be forced to evaluate everything you are sharing about your own company more carefully, ensuring only top quality self-promotional posts, and the best deals that followers will be interested in.

Keeping connected on LinkedIn: 5 friendly reminders

LinkedIn has gotten an interesting reputation of being the social media site used by the unemployed. Although hilarious, this is untrue. Having a LinkedIn account doesn't mean you don't have a real job—it just means you have all of your professional information and contacts in one convenient location.

LinkedIn is important because you can collect letters of recommendation, references, and your [curriculum vitae](#) in one online-accessible location. So it's important to keep all information updated for when someone looks you up. In fact, your LinkedIn account is one of the least private social media sites there is, because it's designed to help people find you.

Because your information on LinkedIn is so publicly accessible, it also goes without saying there are certain things you should keep in mind…

Truth is a virtue. Like on a resume, you should never lie. In fact, it's worse to lie on LinkedIn than it is on a resume, because everyone can see the lie! Use your real name, a photograph of yourself, and don't say you've been to the moon if you haven't.

LinkedIn is not Twitter! If you must connect your other social media updates to your LinkedIn profile, be obsessively selective with what you broadcast. Your LinkedIn profile should not mirror your Facebook and Twitter posts, it becomes clutter and is probably irrelevant. Instead, you could tailor what you write on LinkedIn, using formal language instead of the informal tone of other social media sites.

Personalize and remind. LinkedIn is a vital tool for following-up. You need to connect with professional acquaintances on LinkedIn to ensure they don't forget you—and even then, sometimes they still do! Personalize your invitation messages and remind them where you met. No one likes mass texts. Think of it as a cover letter to being their LinkedIn "friend."

No stalking! Just say hello. Don't connect with someone you don't know just to have connections. It can be considered a mild form of stalking. At the very least, introduce yourself using a direct message before trying to connect with them.

Deos anynoe enojy raeding lkie tihs? NO. As with everything else you write: use proper grammar and correct spelling. Please and thank you, from the 237 team.

How to keep friends and followers on Facebook

Facebook etiquette is becoming increasingly elusive as its range of the users expands. With an evergrowing mix of generations, cultures and upbringings present on Facebook, there are a few universal rules that each of us should keep in mind.

1) Use appropriate profile and cover pictures. Your profile picture is public. Even if you hide everything else, people can see your profile picture and cover photo. Make sure whatever pictures you use reflect who you are and are appropriate for anyone to see, from your parents to your employer.

2) DO NOT VENT! Facebook is a largely public space, wherein you are most likely "friends" with more people than you are friends with in real life. Be mindful of your one and the content of your posts - you don't know who might be reading. Remember, we are all connected by the six degrees of separation.

3) DO NOT BRAG! Facebook is not called "Bragbook" for a reason! Would you sign up for a social site that was designed solely for people to boast? There are more subtle, less obnoxious ways to let your friends and acquaintances know about your milestones. If you got a new job, change your job in the "About Me" section instead of posting a status update.

4) Less is more. Status updates are over-used. There are a number of features on Facebook that allow you to share information without spelling it out for everyone, following the motto "show, don't tell." For example, if you've just had a baby, choose one adorable photo instead of blasting your network with play-by-plays of his or her first meal.

5) Use photo albums. Pictures speak louder than words. If you are on vacation, post an album with your favorite shots instead of status updates about how great the hotel room or bar is.

6) Information is appreciated. Provide as much useful information as possible. If you are participating in a movement or volunteering for an organization, instead of just posting the fact, teach everyone a little bit about the cause and include a useful link.

7) Make me laugh! Humor is key. Status updates are there for a reason, so it's alright to use them. However, remember to infuse humor and useful information in those updates to make them enjoyable and interesting to read.

Overall, treat Facebook like social interactions you would have in real life with an extra pinch of caution. Don't brag, try not to bore anyone and remember to smile.

Twitter Fact vs. Fiction

Fiction: Twitter wants to know everything you do at all times.

Fact: Spare us your personal hygiene mishaps. Don't forget, unless you make your entire account private, anyone and everyone can see your tweets.

Fiction: Unlike on Facebook, you can go nuts on your status updates on Twitter.

Fact: Unless you suddenly found yourself with a monkey in Aruba or something equally entertaining, no need to give us updates every five seconds.

Fiction: It's okay to use whatever language needed to fit your message into 140 characters.

Fact: Twitter is not your phone and you are not sending out a text to your best friend. Show the world you understand grammar and exercise creative ways of saying what you mean more efficiently—instead of omitting all vowels to shorten words.

Fiction: I don't need to reply to every @ question I get.

Fact: The key to Twitter is interaction. If someone took the time to type in your twitter handle, it means they are speaking directly to you. You wouldn't ignore someone if they were speaking to you in person, so don't do it on Twitter. In fact, even if no questions are asked, if someone tweets @ you, try to acknowledge them.

Fiction: In order to acknowledge my followers, I should set up an automatic response whenever I get a new follow.

Fact: Although it's important to be interactive with your followers, if you send a standard "Thank you for following me" message to every new follower, you are spamming them. If it isn't personalized and useful/necessary, it's clutter.

Fiction: Sharing a link for my followers to appreciate doesn't take as much thought as my other tweets.

Fact: If you want to garner enough interest for a click-through, a surprising amount of thought needs to go into every link you tweet. Be sure to shorten URLs with Bit.ly and include not only the

title of the link you are sharing, but a short description. For example, instead of just tweeting the link to an interesting article, tweet the title of the article and a descriptive quote, followed by the shortened link.

Fiction: Hastags are being abused on Twitter.

Fact: A lot of people have begun using impossibly long hashtags in order to say something they don't want to come right out and say. They may be stating how they feel, or letting you know their tweet was written in sarcasm. Those hashtags don't fulfill their intended purpose, but they give hints into the nuances of the tweet. Just make sure you don't go overboard! No one has time to decipher where the spaces should be in a giant hashtag.

Fiction: I don't need to learn how to use hashtags.

Fact: Hashtags are incredibly useful for grouping tweets by commonality. For example, an organization can begin a movement and attach a hashtag to that movement, so everyone involved can find other, related tweets easily. They are vital tools for being discovered and to help people find your profile.

In conclusion, Twitter is a useful, complex beast that can do wonders for you and your company—if you understand it.