



Fact Sheet

“Bad Web Righting”

June 2007

As businesses develop their web sites, many forget that how the content is written is as important as the site design.

Our e-Business Advisers offer their thoughts:

1. What's the problem?

Bad writing is, unfortunately, the rule rather than the exception on the web.

One reason for this is that good writing is hard to do, but another is that many people haven't realised that writing is a vital part of the online experience.

If you read much on the Web, you probably encounter simple "righting" errors all the time.

The mistake "righting" for "writing" is one your word processor's spell-checker can't recognise ("righting" is a perfectly good word, as in "righting a wrong").

Chances are that your grammar checker (if you use one) won't catch it either.

You'll also encounter a lot of content that's poorly organized, poorly reasoned, poorly presented, or just plain poorly written.

Since the writing isn't perceived as a central activity in creating a web site, many companies have never bothered with the kind of editorial cross-checking that they really should have.

2. How should it be done?

Learning to write is like learning most other things - you learn by doing and so you learn to write by actually writing.

Writing for the web requires the same expertise as any other writing, only more so!

For instance, it's been shown that readers on the web have much shorter concentration spans.

Information needs to be presented in a much punchier style, with shorter sentences and paragraphs, and more use of bullet pointed text.

Writing in "Plain English" is also useful too - if your web site is easy to understand, visitors are more likely to want to do business with you.

As The Plain English Campaign say - "you get your message across more often, more easily and in a friendlier way".

Likewise, your web site may also be viewed by potential customers for whom English is not their first language.

How Search Engines interpret your site content is also important too, a point we deal with in another Fact Sheet in this series - "Search Engine Optimisation".

If you want to write and produce your own web site content, you also need to think about who your target audience is, and address them. At



Fact Sheet

least, have a colleague check your content out for grammar and style.

The number of web sites that are badly written and badly edited remains huge, but if you look at

the successful, high-volume web sites, you see professional editing.

The headlines are snappy and the writing is focused, at news sites such as www.bbc.co.uk and www.cnn.com.

Your site may not be on the same scale as these - but the impression your "righting" gives to a visitor is just as important.

3. Useful Links:

www.plainenglish.co.uk -
Web site of the Plain English Campaign, with many useful guidelines.