

Writing for a Web Environment

Mark A. Kellner, News Editor, *Adventist Review* and *Adventist World*

*Adapted from a presentation by Darlene Fichter,
Data Library Coordinator, University of Saskatchewan Library, Canada*

- Explain the difference between Web-only writing and writing for other media
- Note the need for more clarity, brevity in Web writing
- Offer concrete examples of better words and phrases in Web writing

Our purpose today

1. Reading & Writing
2. Research
 - Do's and Don'ts
 - Format, typography, style, ...
4. Strategies to encourage good writing

Outline

- *Focus on IT – the technology*
 - Intranet developers may not have writing experience
 - Programmer, Information architect, Content experts, Intranet manager, Designers
 - Hundreds of authors, **no editor**
- *As a result:*
 - Writing ignored
 - Time spent on top level pages only
 - Less time spent on menus/graphics

Challenges

The Reality

- Micro-content is as important as the navigation, side menus, design

Reading and Writing

- Goal of any church-related Web site is to communicate
 - Mission/Strategy
 - Key messages from leadership, churches
 - To *your* audiences
 - Public – curious about Adventists
 - Members – Want connection

Internet Audience

- Focused on getting the mission accomplished
- Diverse
 - Experience
 - Novice to expert
 - Usage patterns
 - Occasional to daily
 - Tasks & domain knowledge
 - Members, Pastors, administrators, educators
 - Language and location




Expert/Frequent Users*

- Have specific goals
- Depend on you for speed and accuracy
- Impatient with low-density graphics that offer only a few choices
- Prefer fast loading text menus
- Appreciate detailed text menus, site maps, site indexes, “good” search engines
- Accelerators – ways to bypass the fluff

*The majority of Intranet users eventually fall into this category

Users Want to Know

Who?	Tell them who is speaking. What department or person created the page?
What?	What is the page about? Have a title.
When?	Time is important in evaluating the worth. Date every page. Date sections of long documents that are revised part by part.
Where?	Ideally, some indication of where you are; what area or sub-site?

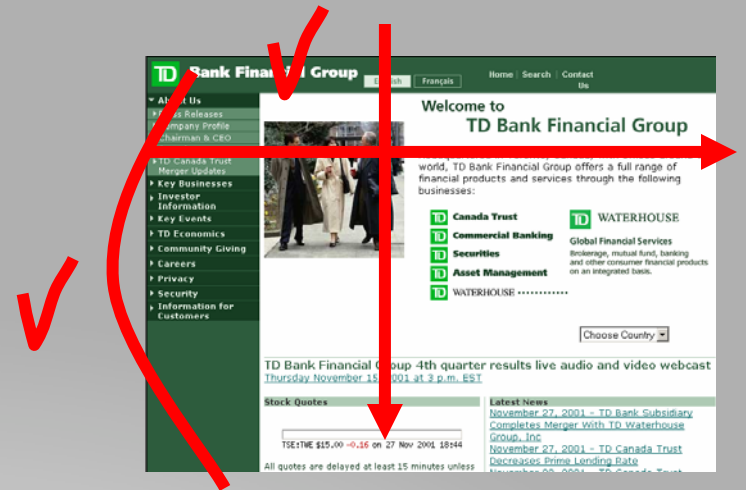
- 
1. Contact information
 2. Internal news about the organization
 3. Press coverage about the organization
 4. Press coverage about a topic
 5. Church policies
 6. Information about competitors
 7. Maps
 8. Contact information for someone outside the organization
 9. Latest analyst report
 10. Background on unfamiliar company

Top 10 Things Constituents Need to Know*

*Adapted from *On-the-Job Research: How Usable Are Corporate Intranets?* By
Alison Head.

How Users Read on Screens

- How do people read on the screen?
 - Top to bottom
 - Left to right
 - Focus first on the micro-content
 - Scroll to the bottom
 - Only after failing
 - side menu
 - top menu



Reading

- 25% slower on the screen



- People who are looking for information don't read, they **scan**.
- If they have to read a help page, most won't.
- Readers understand **more** when reading **less**.

Research shows: DON'T READ

- Create page titles, headings and subheadings
- Be consistent in how you design the headings
 - Use **font** and/or **color** to offset headings

“Scanability”

- Rule of Thumb
 - Emphasis – rule of thumb one at a time. Bold or size.
 - Eyes are tuned to small differences.
 - No need to SHOUT at users.

Headings & Subheadings

- Make every heading word meaningful
- Make sure the 1st headline or title on page summarizes the content
- Separate sections with 2nd level headings
- 3 levels on one page is about all the reader can grasp

Punch Up Headlines

- Use lists or tables
- Use bullets when sequence doesn't matter and use numbers when it does
- Lists speed up scanning but slow down reading
- Use lists when you have key concepts, not full sentences

Use Lists

Anatomy

Biology

Biotechnology

Chemistry

Microbiology

Physics

Zoology

▪Anatomy

▪Biology

▪Biotechnology

▪Chemistry

▪Microbiology

▪Physics

▪Zoology

Anatomy

Biology

Biotechnology

Chemistry

Microbiology

Physics

Zoology

Which is easiest to read? Research says...

- Can help organize content for easier viewing

Tables

Books

20th Century

Journals

Van Gogh

Maps

Modernism

Impressionism

Table: Example 1

Art	Format
20th Century	Books
Modernism	Journals
Impressionism	Maps
Van Gogh	


Table: Example 2

Table: Example 3

Art	20th Century	Modernism	Impressionism
Format	Books	Journals	Maps

- Organize your content to be read in columns, not as rows
- Categorical not alphabetical
- Do not use table borders to delineate the content – use space and background color

Tables

BMO  **Financial Group**

RATES | ABM/BRANCH LOCATOR | SITE MAP | CONTACT US

Sign in

- ONLINE BANKING
- MASTERCARD
- BMO INVESTORLINE
- BMO NESBITT BURNS

FRANÇAIS | 中文

SEARCH

GO

Financial solutions for the world you live in.

Personal Finances

Banking, borrowing, investing and insurance solutions to meet all your personal financial needs.

Business Banking

Products and financial solutions to help you manage your small business.

Corporate & Institutional clients

Capital raising, investing, advisory and research for corporate, government and institutional clients.

What's New

[Bank of Montreal Group of Companies will now be identified as BMO Financial Group](#) and offers you a full range of financial products and services across North America.

More About Us

- [Corporate Information](#)
- [Investor Relations](#)
- [Careers](#)
- [BMO Economics](#)
- [Ombudsman](#)

Online Banking

SIGN IN >>

[Register >>](#)

[View Demo >>](#)

Table: Example

- Make the links in your text meaningful
- Make **visited** and **unvisited** links contrast with the base font color

Users Also Scan for Links

Employee Phone Number Search

1. Search by [last name](#)
2. Browse employees by [office location](#)
3. List all staff, [click here](#)

Example of Scanning

- Overused – everything is a link.
- Used for key concepts instead of lists or headings based on the belief.
- Often the link is referenced itself interrupting the reader's thoughts. To start the tour, click here.

Hypertext: Classic Mistakes

- Hypertext is powerful but can also be distracting
- Links can help reduce clutter by moving information to separate Web pages
- But when concentrating on content, people often ignore embedded links

Use Links Wisely

- Use long descriptive links, captions, or headings so users can eliminate choices
- UIE's research shows that links with 4 to 9 words are more effective

**Create Links That Don't
Need To Be Followed**

- Be succinct
- Pyramid style (newspaper)
- Scanning – lists, lists and more lists
- Looks a lot like PowerPoint

**Reading Slower:
Implications for Style**

1. Strike out useless words.
2. Avoid noun sandwiches.
3. Use "you".
4. Cut out redundancies.
5. Use simple, short words.

5 Tips

Instead of	Use
concerning	about
forward	send
in order to	to
facilitate	help
strategy	plan
access (as a verb)	get, assist
assistance	help, aid
construct	build
in the event of	if

- **½ the word count** of conventional writing

Rule of Thumb: 50%

Invert the Pyramid

- Newspaper style writing
- State your conclusion first
- Summarize most important items first
- Then get to the details



- Stanford/Ponyter study showed that many web visitors will read only the first or second sentences of paragraph
- Use a strong lead sentence that summarizes content
 - Aka blogs

One Idea Per Paragraph

- Verbs get your visitors energized
- Using active verbs also helps improve your credibility
- Examples:
 - Download Marketing XYZ presentation.
 - Sign up for XYZ workshop.

Harness Verbs

- Users are judgmental and strongly adverse to marketese, or “happy talk”
- For your Web site to be credible, you must be:
 - **Current**
 - **Accurate**
 - **Objective**

Reading & Trust

- “Marketese”
 - Anything that sounds like “advertising” is a complete turn off ... the best, the biggest ...
 - Be objective and factual.

Things to Avoid

1. Set an editorial style guide for acronyms, names, etc. (Adventist News Network has an **excellent** one!)
2. Mandate site wide look & feel using CSS; considering typography when deciding on site design
3. Lead by example
4. Recognize good writing
5. Encourage key content providers to be observers in usability testing

11 Strategies to Encourage Good Writing

6. Educate & market
 - Tips, newsletters
7. Set up pre-publication checklists
8. Train new authors
9. Educate pastors, administrators that one of the “W”s in WWW is writing!
10. Make the case again and again!
 - Intranet microcontent

11 Strategies to Encourage Good Writing

- Excellent sites with examples
- “Imitation” – Learn from others
- Using external usability test results
- In-house usability testing
- Write often and write a lot

Secret to Good Wired Writing

- Questions?

Thank you!