

5 Questions to Ask for Writing Great Web Content

...that Gets Results!

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A Simple Blueprint for Writing Web Content that Gets Results

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The rules haven't changed, but it's surprising how many people start writing on the web without regard for the basics. Many people focus on the medium, the latest shiny tool: the blog, the Twitter tweets, and Facebook updates, without regard for the **basic rules of writing copy for the Web**.

Content marketing is a buzz word because marketing people like new buzzes, and it sure beats writing advertisements that get ignored. But smart marketers know the rules and never forget them. Even if the Internet changes at lightning speed, the writing basics for copy are the same.

I'm a newbie, I've only been writing marketing copy for ten years. Before that, I was a journalist and a psychologist so I wrote feature articles and academic papers. Writing content for marketing is different. It's designed to produce an action, most often sales.

Every once in a while, I go back to the basics. A standard learning tool for many copywriters is Maria Veloso's [Web Copy that Sells](#), originally published in 2004. The 2nd edition is now out and I've been reviewing and re-reading it. Good stuff.

Here's a recap of some really key nuggets from this book:

Before you write one word of copy, you must first:

- Know your **objective**
- Know your **target audience**
- Know your **product or service**

I know this seems so common sense it's not worth spending time on, but the time you take to write down a few notes on each of these things will be well worth it.

For example, writing on the web can have several **objectives**, besides making a sale. What is it you'd like readers to do? Contact you for more information? Sign up for a digital report? Leave a comment, watch a video, fill out a survey?

It's okay if you're a teacher and enjoy educating people without any sales objective in mind. However, if you're not asking readers to think, ask, remember, or act, then you're not really teaching, are you? Don't let readers leave saying, "That's nice, so what, bye-bye..."

Who are you trying to write to and reach? The more you know about your audience of readers, the easier it will be to "speak their language." You can't really connect if you don't know to whom, can you?

And of course you **know your products and services**, especially if it's your own business and you've been working in it for a while. But how well do you know what the **benefits** are to your end users? How well do you know your customers' **challenges and problems**?

Example: one of my dear clients is a talented artist who sells original painted greeting cards for various occasions, online through her website. When I asked her what problems does she solve with her cards, she said she provided a thoughtful way of connecting with someone on a special occasion. She hadn't thought out all the other ways she helped her customers:

- Her cards were unique, and therefore said much more than a store-bought card from a large company
- Her cards were original art work which recipients were more likely to keep
- Her cards saved people time from having to go to a store to browse through hundreds of inappropriate cards
- Her cards saved people the hassles of getting into a car and driving
- Her cards offered a large selection of messages, including many blank

The more you can dig deeper into all the challenges your customers face, and the **more content** you can create that addresses solutions, the better your writing will resonate with readers. The stronger your online writing will be. Readers will subscribe, keep coming back, sign up for more, and become loyal fans.

I want to give you this simple **5-step blueprint for writing web copy that sells**, as explained in the [Velosa book](#). It's easy to remember since it's presented as 5 questions.

5 Questions to Ask for Writing Great Web Content

#1: What's the Problem?



Organize and simplify your Web writing by asking 5 important questions:

1. **What is the problem (pain, predicament)?**
2. **Why hasn't this problem been solved?**
3. **What is possible?**
4. **What is different now?**
5. **What should you do now?**

As you compose your copy, you should write out several sentences to answer each question. This will keep you on task, and lead your readers through to action. I suppose it depends on what you're writing, but I can't think of many web pages, blog posts, newsletter articles where these 5 questions wouldn't be appropriate.

I've been re-reading Maria Velosa's [Web Copy that Sells](#) this week. Her blueprint for creating simple copy that works to market your products and services is clear. There's a reason it's organized this way.

Psychologically, we're hard wired to sit up and pay attention to problems. This is why it's a good idea to lead off with your headline and first paragraph addressing readers' pain. Negative emotions are strong enough to wake us up and get us to read the rest of the story.

There are two things you must realize about this seemingly obvious and simple question:

1. People who are your target audience may not realize they have a problem (or how bad it can get)
2. People need to know you fully understand their pain AND CARE before they will read anything you have to say about it

Write a few sentences out about the problem. You want your readers to say,

- "Oh how true, she really understands me."
- "She reads me like a book."
- "She must be following me around."
- "She's been there, done that too."
- "Oh yeah, that's true too, I hadn't thought about that..."

And this is why you really need to know your audience well. **Know them and care about them.** You've got to communicate understanding AND empathy. Not to be clichéd, but it's really true:

"People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care."

Yesterday I wrote about how one of my clients hadn't realized all the benefits of selling her original art-work cards online: [A Simple Blueprint for Writing Web Content that Gets Results](#). When we listed all the ways her cards benefited people, we came up with 4-5 problems she solved.

One way to explore question #1, **What's the problem?** is to make a list of all the benefits of your products and services to clients. Each benefit can be attached to a problem.

Here's another example of how this works.

Example: Imagine I'm writing copy designed to promote my new ebook, [Content Marketing with Blogs](#). This 15 page report is free (a feature) and provides many benefits to small business owners how to blog successfully. Take just one benefit from reading this ebook as an example...

Feature: This report teaches you how to write great blog content.

Benefit: Writing and publishing great web content gets you found on the Internet

Problem: With so much information on the Web, how do you get found by the specific people who have the problems you solve?

Other manifestations of this problem are:

- How to stand out in a crowded niche
- How much to share
- How personal to get
- How technical and detailed to get
- How frequently to publish
- How to get read by more people
- How to publish using multi-media tools
- How to optimize for search engines...

The list could go on, and as you build a list of problems, think of it as a list of content ideas. Publish a page or post or newsletter addressing every aspect of the problems your customers face. You won't run out of for content ideas for quite a while.

Related Posts:

[3 Things to Write \(or Speak\) About Confirmation Biases: Brain Based Content Marketing](#)

Content Marketing Question #2: Why Hasn't This Problem Been Solved?



In Maria Velosa's [Web Copy that Sells](#), 2nd Edition, recently released, her 5 simple steps for writing on the web are:

1. **What is the problem (pain, predicament)?**
2. **Why hasn't this problem been solved?**
3. **What is possible?**
4. **What is different now?**
5. **What should you do now?**

Question #2, Why hasn't this problem been solved? This is a great opportunity to address the challenges your readers and potential customers face.

You have a chance to show you understand your readers well, and you have an expert's understanding of the subject matter. You can delve into the history of the problem, providing insights they may have never thought of.

The answers to this question serves to build audience anticipation for a new solution you're about to reveal.

- How is it they haven't solved their problem?
- Why is it that traditional solutions aren't working?
- Why are they still stuck?
- What's new about this situation that contributes to more frustration?

This is where you can really hook readers into your story. Yet so many blogs and email messages skip this step. It doesn't have to be long, but discussing these points in a few sentences will get your readers to say, "Oh, right, I've experienced this. She understands me. What's the solution, then?"

Next up: Questions #3 - #5 to ask when writing content for the Web that gets results.

Content Marketing Questions: #3 What's Possible?



(Photo Credit: [Shutterstock](#))

This is really what content marketing is all about. When you answer the following 5 questions, your writing tasks are simplified and your copy becomes clear.

1. **What is the problem (pain, predicament)?**
2. **Why hasn't this problem been solved?**
3. **What is possible?**
4. **What is different now?**
5. **What should you do now?**

First answer question #1, **what's the problem**. Then, answer questions #2, **why hasn't the problem been solved?** Then answer question #3, **what's possible?**

As you write out several sentences to answer these questions, you'll lead your readers through a path that leads to action. Action is the goal for all good content designed to market your business on the Web.

In Maria Velosa's [Web Copy That Sells](#) book, this is basis of a 5-step blueprint for writing on the Web.

In psychology, counseling, and coaching, when you describe how life could be better, you're setting the stage for people to make changes. You're engaging someone to start using the brain neurons involved in positive thinking.

Awareness that a change is needed is the first step (**questions 1 and 2**). **Painting a picture** of how things will be better is the next step (**questions 3, 4 and 5**).

In marketing and copywriting, this section is known as the **benefits**. The key idea that makes a real difference happens when you drill down deep to core values in people's lives.

Example: A pill that gets rid of back pain provides a big benefit: no more back pain. That's obvious. As a writer, you must draw a picture of what is possible now that the pain is gone.

- No more sleepless nights
- No more sitting out dances, sports games, playing with grandkids, etc.
- No more staying home instead of going out

- No more grumpiness because of pain
- No more feeling "unsexy" because of pain!

Example: (Note: Excuse the self-serving, not-so-subtle promotion of my newly revised free ebook!) [Content Marketing with Blogs](#) provides 4 key ways to make your blogging easier so you get more results.

- No more struggle with what to write about
- No more sitting for hours at the computer
- No more wasting time doing the wrongs things
- No more publishing good content that's only seen by a few people
- No more confusion about what's important on a blog and what's not
- Saves you time, money and your most precious commodity, your energy
- More leads, more opportunities, more clients, more money

Write down all the ways your product or service will make your peoples' problems disappear. This is where you can build excitement and anticipation for your solutions.

Next Up: Questions #4 & #5: What is different now? What should you do now?

5 Content Marketing Questions: Getting readers to take action



(Photo Credit: [Shutterstock](#))

Here's a final note in my blog post series about **writing good content on the Web** that gets results. In Maria Velosa's 2009 edition of [Web Copy that Sells](#), she suggests **5 questions** your copy should answer:

1. **What is the problem (pain, predicament)?**
2. **Why hasn't this problem been solved?**
3. **What is possible?**
4. **What is different now?**
5. **What should you do now?**

As you answer these questions, you lead readers down a path towards action. Good content on the Web, when it's well written, should:

- **Educate**
- **Entertain**
- **Engage readers**
- **Enrich lives**

If at all possible, you should strive to enrich the lives of your readers as well. Try to make their lives better by showing them how they can **save time, energy or money**.

Question #4: What is different now?

How will your product or service make your readers' lives different? This is where you explain who you are, how you know what you're talking about, how your product or service can help them, and what's different about your product or service that will eliminate their problem.

Social Proof

This is a good spot to drop in a testimonial. People do business with people, not companies. Social proof is a scientifically validated way of persuading people to trust you. When readers learn of how you've helped others, they see the possibilities for themselves. They think, "If he had success with this, maybe I will too."

It also helps them to see how what you're writing about has been applied and what kinds of results can be expected. Specific examples and **case studies** spell everything out for readers and make your copy come alive.

Think about your **Unique Selling Proposition**. How are you better than your competitors? Write out a few sentences about what differentiates your product/service.



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Question #5: What should you do now?

This is where you tell your readers what you want them to do. A call to action may be to: Pick up the phone

- Register
- Sign up, subscribe
- Click the link to go read something
- Click the link to buy something
- Ask a question
- Fill out a survey, vote
- Enter a contest
- Hire you

The key here is to state it clearly. You must tell them what to do, how to do it, and what they can expect once they have clicked, signed-up, etc. You must also reassure them of security and privacy and refunds.

Hopefully, you will have all further steps set up so there is a minimum hassle to your readers and prospects. Don't make them fill out unnecessary information and forms. If you've answered all their objections and spelled out what they can expect, and your systems are impeccable, you will have a minimum dropout rate. You will be successful

(Note: One of the best systems for handling registrations and sales is [KickStartCart](#). Many people making money and marketing on the Web use this software because it handles so many tasks such as registrations, subscription, sales, affiliates, autoresponders and such.)

But like all things on the Web, there are always glitches and unexpected questions from people who attempt unsuccessfully to get what you're offering. Be prepared to respond immediately to emails, or have a good customer service response team in place.



About Patsi Krakoff, Psy.D. The Blog Squad

Patsi Krakoff is a newsletter, blog, and content marketing expert who founded ***The Blog Squad***.

Patsi provides training and coaching for professionals who want to beef up their newsletter or blog for marketing optimization. She ghost writes articles for executive and leadership coaches at www.ContentforCoachesandConsultants.com. Find out more about how she can help you by visiting her blog over at WritingontheWeb.com.

She was trained as a journalist and has a doctorate in psychology, with ten years experience marketing online businesses. Patsi is writing her first novel about life in Paris.