

How to Write Digital Content that Gets Read

With over 1.7 billion websites on the internet, you might say we have a content clutter issue. Adding to the pile should be done strategically, with creativity and careful consideration of how to write digital content. Members of the legal community often write in a style they learned in law school, which may not be the best way to write online content.

This article provides a step-by-step guide for attorneys and legal professionals to follow when writing blogs, articles, legal alerts, white papers and other online content.

The Planning Stage

Who is your audience?

Before deciding on topic selection and content type, take a few moments to think about your audience:

- Who is the ideal client/audience that you want to read your content?
- Why is the subject matter important to this audience at this time?
- Will the piece directly address a concern or issue that the reader is likely to have?

What information does your audience need right now?

Once you've decided who your audience is, research topics that are important to them. While you should already have a general idea of what matters to your target readers, you can use Google Trends to track topics that are trending across the internet. [Google Trends](#) generates data that cover international Google searches, and users can customize the tool to research trends in smaller geographic regions and specific timeframes. Pay particular attention to query data – the questions that people are asking search engines – because that can help you identify the exact information people want to know.

What content style best suits your topic?

Next, determine which type of content best suits your topic. Is this a marketing or technical piece? Depending on the purpose, the structure can take different forms. For example, if you're writing thought leadership, decide which format to use – an opinion piece, white paper, news and trends blog post, legal alert, or Q&A.

Writing Digital Content

Now that you know your audience, topic and format, it's time to write. While digital content needs to follow the basic rules of writing and grammar, the way people read and consume content online dictates specific adjustments to traditional writing styles.



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Eye-tracking studies show that people tend to scan online content versus reading word for word. Furthermore, scanning doesn't necessarily happen in a linear pattern from top to bottom on a page. Readers tend to skip around, jumping forward and backtracking to rescan content again. That makes it important to create content that adapts to user behavior.

Here's how to create content that's best suited to readers who scan.

Craft engaging headlines.

This may be the single-most-important part of your web page. Don't just go with the first thing that pops into your head. Brainstorm multiple versions, and play with word choice and order. Copywriters often refer to the "four u's" of crafting effective headlines:

1. Make it unique.
2. Be ultra-specific.
3. Create a sense of urgency.
4. Convey usefulness.

Put the most-important information at the top of the page.

Readers' first impressions will dictate whether they stay on the web page to read more or leave your website. In the first few sentences, explain clearly what you are writing about and why it matters to your audience. If you're writing about a legal matter, don't worry about cramming in a case name right away. This can be referenced later on in the piece.

Keep paragraphs short.

Building content in short paragraphs improves readability. Aim for three to five sentences per paragraph, and don't worry about breaking the flow of your writing. Each new paragraph is an opportunity to grab the reader's attention again.

Use bolded text and subheads.

Readers who are scanning content quickly gravitate to bold text and larger font sizes. Make your subheads punchy and attention grabbing to encourage visitors to read what's below. Subheads also provide an opportunity to use header tags to improve search engine optimization (SEO). Search engines place a higher value on keywords in these meta tags, so choose your words carefully.

Avoid writing in legalese.

While it might make you look smart, very few people want to read web copy that's saturated with legalese. Instead, use plain language that's clear and precise. Short sentences are fine. Simplifying your language ensures your message will get across accurately and without ambiguity.

Use bulleted and numbered lists.

Find ways to incorporate bullets and numbered lists to draw the reader's eye and emphasize key points.

Do not use footnotes.

Please! Hyperlinking to source material is the accepted practice for digital content.

Incorporate visuals.

Images, tables, graphs and infographics often do a better job than words at conveying complex information. They also provide visual diversity and catch the attention of readers who are scanning content. Be sure to include alt tags in images so screen readers and assistive technologies can interpret visual content.

Writing for Search Engines

Even though SEO is important, don't write for search engines. Even Google recommends writing for *people* and not search engines. You can still make sure that each web page has optimized elements to help improve its search rankings and online visibility. Here's how to do that.

Title tags: This HTML tag shows up as the page title in search results. When you're writing for the web, create an optimized title tag for each URL. Use relevant keywords, and stay within the recommended 55- to 60-character count.

Meta description: The meta tag appears in search result pages as the description underneath the page title. While Google doesn't consider keywords in this tag for ranking purposes, the description helps entice people to click on your page. Think about this 150- to 160-character tag as ad copy to promote your page.

Links: Use links to point to other helpful resources on your website. When readers click on a second page during their website visit, it lowers the bounce rate on your page, which sends positive ranking signals to search engines. In addition to internal links, link to content on high-authority websites to provide related information to your readers (such as what otherwise might be in footnotes). Once your web page is published, check the hyperlinks to make sure they are pointing to the correct pages.

Final Thoughts

Thought leadership content, such as blogs, articles and legal alerts, helps raise the profile of the publishing attorney. Be sure to show author information on the web page, including the attorney name and a link to their bio page.

Finally, don't overlook the importance of editing and proofreading. Web pages with errors convey a less-than-professional image for the firm and the authoring attorney. With easy access to a range of online tools, checking for errors can be built right into your writing process, although the human eye often catches things that automated tools can miss.

Following these guidelines should provide structure to your process and result in content that rises to the top of the content clutter pile.

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