Short and Snappy: Writing for the Digital World

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Overview of session

• Users’ expectations for:
  • Websites
  • Blogs
  • Social media
• Setting goals for your website
• Good formatting strategies
• Reliable storytelling tactics
• How social media can help you
• How to dive into social media/improve what you’re already doing
• Takeaways and next steps
Website: Where users go to get information
Website: Evaluate where you are

- Outline your existing site
  - Does this structure make sense?
  - Is anything out of place?
  - Is anything missing?
  - When were pages last updated?
- Ask students, faculty and others to review your site
  - Give them a task to complete
  - Have them review a key page, tell you what they learned from it
Website: Establish your goals

• Determine primary and secondary audiences
  • Why are they visiting your site?
• Develop goals for the website
  • What do you want it to accomplish?
Website: Creating some goals chemistry

Goals chemistry: That moment when you tell the user what he wants to know in the way you want him to know it.
Exercise: Audiences & Goals

• Who is my primary audience? Who are secondary audiences?
• What does my audience want from my website?
• What are my goals for the website?
**Academic website**

**Audience:** Prospective students, their parents, current students, prospective faculty, current faculty, the world

**They want:** Information

**My goals:** Student recruitment, faculty recruitment, sharing information, promoting the department & University

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**Student life website**

**Audience:** Current students, prospective students, parents of current students, faculty & staff, the world

**They want:** Information

**My goals:** Awareness of opportunities, engagement, general promotion of Missouri State students & environment
Exercise: Adding information to your website

Hi–

Internships will now be offered for our students. Can you see that the attached information from HD International makes it onto the website?

Thanks,
Dr. Presley
To: Missouri State Dept. of Music, Fashion & Entertainment

As YOU know, Hound Dog International is the world’s leading maker of blue suede shoes. We have heard our shoes described as “heavenly” and “life changing”. Some even call us scrumptious!!!! It is easy to understand, then why we take such care when choosing partners for our heavenly, life changing and scrumptious products. When one is thinking of blue suede shoes by Hound Dog International, only the best will do!!! In the past, we’ve considered taking on interns, but we have always hesitated. Who could match our standards of perfection? Who would even want to try? In days gone by, we’ve considered and rejected partnerships with entities such as

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Now, having learned of Dr. Presley’s unprecedented and remarkable work in our field, we are now led to feel and hope that we have found the ideal partner in developing the trailblazers of tomorrow’s blue suede shoe frontier. All of which is why, starting next semester, we will be accepting applications exclusively from Dr. Presley’s students. May they all be bold enough to try! It is very important that applicants remember certain things when applying. 1. They must include a portfolio of past work. 2. They must write an essay expression heartfelt passion for blue suede. Perhaps even more important than those, students must really want to be a part of all the wonderful things we are doing at Hound Dog International.
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What should I look for?

- Does this support any of my website’s goals?
- What is the main purpose of the content?
- Is this one-time use or long-term information?
- Who is this content relevant for?
- Where on my website would this content make sense?
What are my goals again?

• Student recruitment
• Faculty recruitment
• Sharing of information
• General promotion of Missouri State
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Key takeaways

• Hound Dog International is a prestigious brand.
  • Consider a hyperlink to the Hound Dog International website.
• Our students have a unique internship opportunity.
• Dr. Presley is the coordinator of this program.
  • Include his contact information.
• There is a specific process that applicants must follow.
  • Submit portfolio.
  • Write essay about their interest in fashion.
• Some follow-up may be necessary!
Internships

Find your place in the fashion industry
Gain hands-on experience in the fashion industry. Apply for a highly competitive summer internship with Hound Dog International.

Internship description
Summer interns will gain experience in all aspects of the business, including:
• Product development and testing
• Marketing
• Pricing
• Distribution

Application instructions
Submit the following items via email to intern@hdinternational.com by March 1:
• Electronic portfolio of past design work
• A 500-word essay expressing passion for fashion

Hound Dog International is a worldwide leader in the fashion industry. Explore more about Hound Dog International on its website. If you have questions about this internship program, contact Dr. Elvis Presley.
Writing for the digital world: Formatting strategies

Challenges
• Visitors won’t read every word.
• They will skim, not read.
• They’ll notice structure more than individual words.
• Readers want you to tell them what to do.
• They pay attention to lists and hyperlinks.
• They pay attention to photo and video content.

Strategies
• Lead with strength.
• Convey one idea per paragraph.
• Use internal sub-headings.
• Write short sentences with action words.
• Use bulleted lists and hyperlinks.
• Add photo or video.
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Which goals have I served?

- Student recruitment
- Faculty recruitment
- Sharing of information
- General promotion of Missouri State
Blog: The perfect place to tell a story
Blog: What does it do?

- It supports your website’s goals.
- It’s a great format for time-sensitive information.
- It has strong SEO benefits.
  - Update at least once per week.
- It speaks from a more conversational, personal tone.
  - Rounds out your website’s recruitment messages
  - Puts a familiar face on faculty, students and staff
  - Talks about what you offer in human terms

Communicates meaning, atmosphere, environment
Writing for the digital world: Storytelling tactics

- Tell a specific story with a specific point-of-view.
- Start in the middle of the action.
- Use details to convey meaning.
- If possible, subvert expectations.
- If possible, establish (and resolve) a conflict.
- If possible, set up a puzzle or mystery.
Exercise: The 6 word story

I hoped that this would happen.

- Has a specific point-of-view
- Starts during the action
- Tells us about the speaker
Exercise: The 6 word story

I thought this would never happen.

• Has a specific point-of-view
• Starts during the action
• Tells us about the speaker
• Sets up a mystery
Exercise: The 6 word story

I prayed that this wouldn’t happen.

• Has a specific point-of-view
• Starts during the action
• Tells us about the speaker
• Sets up a mystery
• Subverts expectations
Exercise: The 6 word story

I’ve wanted but dreaded this moment.

- Has a specific point-of-view
- Starts during the action
- Tells us about the speaker
- Sets up a mystery
- Subverts expectations
- Establishes a conflict
Exercise: The 6 word story

Well, I can’t tell him now.

- Has a specific point-of-view
- Starts during the action
- Tells us about the speaker
- Subverts expectations
- Establishes a conflict
- Sets up a big mystery that takes us in a new direction
Exercise: The 6 word story

Storytelling tactics

- Tell a specific story with a specific point-of-view.
- Use details to convey meaning.
- Start during the action.
- Subvert expectations.
- Establish a conflict.
- Set up a puzzle or mystery.
Hi –

Dr. Presley did it again! Please see that news of the attached grant makes it onto our website.
The Association for Music in Prisons (AMP), the world’s leading organization for the advancement of music composed or distributed in prisons, is pleased to bestow a grant of $15,000 on Dr. Elvis Presley for his research on Jailhouse Rocking. His landmark paper “Everybody in the Whole Cell Block” convinced our board of the worthiness of his research, and AMP is proud to support Dr. Presley’s continued study.

- Faculty accomplishment
- Specific to a certain time
- Supports the following goals: sharing information, faculty recruitment, student recruitment

Perfect for the blog!
Blog: Example

Challenges

• Scholarly tone
• Told from association’s perspective
• Doesn’t communicate the point of his research or why it matters

Storytelling tactics

• Tell a specific story with a specific point-of-view.
• Start during the action.
• Use details to convey something about the subject.
• Subvert expectations.
• Establish a conflict.
• Set up a puzzle or mystery.

Need more information!
Blog: Example

• Reach out to Dr. Presley:
  • What is the purpose of this project?
  • How will the funds be used?
  • What have you learned by working on this project?
  • What surprised you?
  • What do you want others to understand about it?
  • Do you have any photos or videos to share?
Untapped talent in an unexpected place

It’s easy to think of prison as the end of all opportunity, but Dr. Elvis Presley has found that it can also mark a beginning. He’s been working with inmates who discovered their musical talent only after being incarcerated.

“For many of them, it was their first chance to slow down and produce this beautiful music,” Presley said. “I was just there to listen, but when I realized the quality, I started taping it on my phone! Then I brought in real equipment to record demos.”

Presley used those recordings to help two past participants find jobs in the music industry after they were released from prison.

Recognition from AMP

Presley feared he’d have to quit listening when his project ran out of funding. Thanks to a $15,000 grant from the Association for Music in Prisons (AMP), his study will continue for at least two more years.

According to Presley, “AMP is making it possible for me to support people who are looking for a happier and more fulfilling way of life. This work fundamentally changes lives—including mine.”
**Specific point-of-view**

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Start during the action

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Use details to convey meaning

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Establish a conflict

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Blog: Using formatting strategies

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Social media: A way to create new impressions
Why should I use social media?

• It empowers you to get your story out – directly.
• It allows you to connect with people where they already are.
• It allows you to build relationships with new people while reinforcing existing relationships.
• It gives other people an easy channel for promoting your brand.
What should I talk about?

- Timely content: events, achievements, internships, competitions, career opportunities
- Evergreen content: mission, unique offerings, value messages
- Share photos and links.
- Share your blog content!
Social media: Best practices for all platforms

• Adopt a long-term philosophy. If you commit to a platform, stick with it.
• Get selective. Be wary of jumping into too many social networks at once.
• Understand that things move fast. Post consistently and with low expectations.
• Content is king! If you think something is interesting, others are likely to as well.
• Brevity is crucial.
• Speak authentically to your ideal audience.
Exercise: Your ideal audience
Exercise: Your ideal audience

- Digital native – completely comfortable online and on social media
- Trusts crowd sourced information and user-generated content (UGC)
- Loves visual content
- Binges on media; uses search, hyperlinks and social media to find interesting content
- Civic-minded and likes being involved; cares about causes
Untapped talent in an unexpected place

Professor’s passion for music helps others find a new place

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Social media: Sample tweet

Creating a path from prison to the recording studio – why Dr. Presley’s work counts: bit.ly/U5IZ8G
#FollowYourPassion
Meant for my audience

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Civic-minded
Digital native
UGC
Hyperlink
Photo
So what can I take away?

• Does your website’s organization make sense?
  • Ask someone to find something on it.
• Define your audiences and goals.
  • Get input from stakeholders; write the goals down.
• Use the formatting strategies.
• Update your blog; set a goal of one post per week.
• Use the storytelling tactics to engage readers.
• Identify the ideal audience for your social media.
• Use the resources; share this information with others.
  • Additional exercises available in handout
  • Questions that might help you gather blog content are in handout
  • Resources for photos and other information are included in handout