

Why Content is King on the Internet

[Add to Favorites](#) | [Email to a Friend](#) | [NetProfit Archives](#)

Dec. 27, 2000

The saying “Content is King” has become the old saw of the Internet. It’s been repeated so often that people have ceased to pay attention to it. They do so at their peril. Like many oft repeated and ignored sayings, it’s origins lie in practicality and common sense. It’s repeated because it’s true.

Information is the common currency of the internet. There is no other reason for a website to exist. The website can tell about an organization or company, an area of common interest, a product or service, a point of view, a location or a person. But in each of these instances, it is the quality of the information that determines the worth of the site.

People come to a website to avail themselves of that information. Once they arrive at the site, the quicker they can drill down to the information they want, the more useful that site is to them. This is true whether they information they’re searching for is whether the Lakers won their last game or whether the accounting software they’re ordering handles payroll.

You Can’t Have Too Much Information

People are used to looking at information in a linear way. When people compile the information to go on their website, they look the vast reams that could go on it and say, “People will never read all this!” They’re absolutely right. People won’t. But on the web, they don’t have too. This isn’t a book they have to sift through to find the pearl of wisdom they’re searching for. This is the web, where every piece of information is a few quick mouse clicks away. And there, hidden in all that information, you can be sure there’s some little tidbit that someone will be looking for.

Let the information unfold in layers. If the information you’re relaying is intricate and complex, start with an executive summary or a synopsis. Tailor the information in bite sized pieces that won’t clog the palate. If the information has whet the appetite of your visitor, then let them delve into the topic in depth. If the information is presented in this way, I’ve never heard anyone complain that a site had too much information. On the other hand, I hear the opposite complaint every day. “There was nothing on the site. It was a waste of time!”

Uniquely Yours

So, if lots of content is good, then I should just borrow as much as I can from other sites, right? Well, not really. First of all, there’s a tiny little legal obstacle called copyright infringement. We only copy information from other sites if we’re sure we have the right to do so (often it’s indicated at the foot of the article, as with this one) and we give credit to the source and author.

The really valuable content is unique information people won’t find on other sites. This can be supported with links to further resources on other sites. If you’re selling a product or service, make sure you provide exhaustive information about features, benefits, competitive comparisons, in short, anything anyone could possibly want to know about what you sell. Remember, the web is the ultimate consumer research tool and buyers are taking advantage of it in greater and greater numbers.

Me, Myself and My Customer

Ultimately, the supreme authority on what information should be on your site is the visitor to your site. When designing your site, seek feedback from your intended audience. Get them to tell you what they'd like to see. And, as you develop your site, continue to use them as a sounding board to determine what makes it to the server and what ends up on the digital equivalent of the cutting room floor.

Always, always, always (are you getting the feeling that I think this next point is important?) always make decisions about your site from the viewpoint of the intended user. Try to put yourself in their mindset. If the question comes, "Should this be online?" pretend you're your own visitor and then make your decision. And if you're still unsure, always err of the side of putting too much information on your site rather than too little. Superfluous information can always be ignored. Missing information just leaves a big hole.

Spiders Love Content

Lots of content on your site presents a fabulous buffet for search engine spiders. They love to chew their way through tons of tasty text, indexing scores of possible keywords that could bring visitors to your site as they go. Present the search engines with lots of text and you'll find visitors drawn to your site by the dozens, looking for the content they'll find on your site.

When we evaluate new sites coming to us for positioning we love to see sites rich with content. Ideally, this content is presented in flat HTML pages, presenting the spiders an easy, straightforward path through the site.

Finding the Missing Links

The other marketing benefit of a unique content rich site is that you'll find other sites eager to link to you. This will benefit you in two ways. First of all, people do follow these links. In fact, links are often cited as the number one way people find new sites. Secondly, these links will help boost those search engine rankings, especially if they're coming from high quality, content rich sites. The reason these links are so valuable to the search engines is that they come from pages with content that is usually highly relevant to the content on your site that they're linking to. It's this reciprocal relevancy that search engines such as Google and AltaVista love to see. The more connected your site to the rest of the web, the better. (For more on the structure and connectivity of the web, read the article [Bowtie Theory](#) on our website)

Navigating through the Maze

A site with vast amounts of information is a site that visitors will love, if they can find what they're looking for. Make sure your navigation tools are clear and intuitive to use. Don't leave your visitors guessing where the information they seek might be located.

Ideally, you want to provide your user with two or three ways to drill down to the information relevant to them. Your navigation bar should lay out your site in logical topic areas. You might want to consider a hierarchal nested menu that allows users to quickly choose between main topics and sub topics, drilling down quickly to relevant areas. There are several javascripts that allow you to do this. One we've used is by OpenCube (www.opencube.com) but this one does come with a licensing fee attached.

Another navigation tool is a site map. This shows the structure of your site, with topics and subtopics, in a clear outline. Hyperlinks take the user directly to the section of your site that looks like it contains the

information they're looking for. Incidentally, this also provides an excellent road map for search engines to ensure they crawl all the main pages of your site.

Finally, a site wide text search tool provides an instant way for users to do a keyword search on your site and go to the pages found instantly. If you've used FrontPage to build your site, there's a built in search tool (you must have FrontPage extensions installed). If not, there's several CGI scripts available that will give you the same result. Consider making a small search tool part of every page, incorporating it into your navigation bar. If your site is selling products online, I would highly recommend making an inventory search tool part of your store's navigation bar.

The Database Dilemma

One highly efficient way to present a huge amount of information to the user in an efficient way is to use a database to drive that information, using template designs and dynamically generated content. With a database, the page calls the appropriate information from the database and displays it in a preformatted way in the appropriate place. E-commerce storefronts are almost always database driven.

The good news about databases is that they're much easier to maintain, they have a built in search tool and they save the Webmaster from having to build hundreds of individual pages. The bad news is that most search engines can't crawl inside the site to index all that wonderful content. The majority of your site will be part of what is referred to as the [Invisible or Deep Web](#). Also, depending on how the site is built, it might not be possible for other sites to link to specific pages. If the pros outweigh the cons and you do decide to go the database route, consult with a search engine specialist (like ourselves) to see how your site can be made search engine friendly.

Blood, Sweat and Content

There are no short cuts to building a good content rich site. It's going to mean that someone is going to be spending a lot of time adding that content to your website. But the rewards will more than pay back your investment.

Copyright 2001 - Searchengineposition Inc.

This article can be reproduced in it's entirety, if the author credit is retained and there is a prominent source link to www.searchengineposition.com.