

Don't babble.

Make me like you in five seconds or I'll never speak to you again.

In a social situation, that statement might seem a bit high-and-mighty. But in the world of web sites, people frequently confuse "brochure sites" with real ink-and-paper brochures. With a paper brochure, readers can flip through to find information quickly. With a web site, it can take time to find needed details and make decisions about whether to buy.

Every visit to your home page is an opportunity to pitch new business. Pitches that are long-winded and vague are irritating. You're busy and so are the people looking at your site: If you can answer a potential customer's questions quickly and clearly, you'll save them time and make them feel good about you. But if you make your customer work too hard, he/she may give up and go straight to your competition!

A few points to consider for your site content:

Why? Because people are busy.

So you've got a great product? Your competition thinks they're even better. And you're both at the same party, trying to get the attention of the same people. Here's how to get surfers to stick around long enough to find out why it's you and not your competition.

Point 1: Get to the point quickly, especially on your home page. You should state

in your first short paragraph that you're the XYZ Company and you sell ABC range of products. Make it easy for your readers!

Point 2: The most important information goes at the beginning of a paragraph; rank paragraphs in order of importance. Web site readers tend to skim (surf) without reading everything on the page, so — again — make it easy for them. In the first sentence of each paragraph, introduce the subject and the conclusion: "Our feline driving school will teach your cat proper driving skills." Then, go on to describe some of the course work you put pets through.

Point 3: "Chunk" your pages by subject matter — one page, one subject and two or three paragraphs on each page. Your home page should be a brief introduction to the company and product line. Make it easy for visitors to find out everything else by including a list of links that function like a table of contents. These links could include subject headings like "Products", "Testimonials", "Corporate", "News", "Frequently Asked Questions" and of course, "Contacts."

Point 4: Don't use jargon. Just like countries and provinces, your business has a unique language and a culture. And if you've ever struggled with a second language, you'll know how tiring it can be. Don't use industry or product-specific expressions — use simple, short-syllable words and terms that are common to the masses.

Point 5: Don't use overly-popular expressions, also known as clichés. The reason for this one is psychological: The mind tends to ignore stimulation that happens repeatedly

(think of white noise). If you can invent a new way of describing "thinking outside the box" or "pushing the envelope", use it because it will rattle brains and get people thinking. But don't use those ones and remove the new one from your vocabulary as soon as it becomes popular!

Point 6: Avoid self-congratulation you can't prove. Every marketer says their product is the best. If you're the best, prove it by describing exactly how your product will save the customer time and money. Unless you can prove it quickly, though, bragging can alienate readers.

Point 7: Have an FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) list. An FAQ is your opportunity for detail. This is a page (or pages) that lists questions customers could ask about your products and services. These might be technical but that depends on what you're selling or promoting. Again, organize the FAQ with the most important information at the top of the page and at the top of each paragraph.

Point 8: Chose and use graphics carefully and try not to overdo them. Graphics add to download time, making your site just a little harder to access —



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