

# IMPROVING USER EXPERIENCE AND GAINING CONVERSION THROUGH CONTENT STRATEGY IN WEB DESIGN

***artversion***





One of the most effective ways to increase the UX on a site is with the use of content strategy. The problem, however, is that many site owners looking to launch a new site, or engaging in a redesign, don't see content strategy as an integral part of the design process. Look at it this way – 'web design' at its core is pretty straightforward. People know what the deliverable is, and (generally) know what to expect from that process. When it comes to content, it's not so clear cut – but the result is just as, if not more important, than the design aspect.

# THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN **COPYWRITING** AND **CONTENT STRATEGY**

For many who may not be familiar with content strategy, 'content' may just be viewed as another way to say 'copywriting' – which is seen as either a last stop in the refining and editing process (checking for typos, consistency, grammar, etc). To clarify, the difference between 'copywriting' and 'content strategy' must be outlined.

Simply taking existing copy that a company has written for their business plan, core values or product information is not the same as what should be used for the web. This is regular marketing 'copywriting', that can be used for core messaging, usually in print. This kind of copy is meant solely to inform. Writing for the web, on the other hand, must be crafted to direct customers to take action – whether that be sign up, purchase, call or buy – the goal is conversion. The contextual process that gets a website user to their goal is known as 'content strategy'.

While design may traditionally be more valued to the client, content strategy is the core of what will make the design work. Without it, a design may be seen as incomplete or even incoherent. When a content strategy process is implemented, not only is the design more effective, the outcome of the site's analytics are far better.

# THE CONTENT STRATEGY PROCESS



## INVENTORY AND AUDIT

This is the 'who, what, why, where and when' of the process, and generally, the most exhaustive. Much of this information can be gathered in the kick-off process, but investigative work also needs to be done on competitive and marketplace analysis. A in-depth understanding of the brand or company that the site is representing is critical to correctly positioning the information. All of this information must be compiled and briefed to the design team before moving on to the design process and even wire framing.

## CURATION

When content is not being built from the 'ground up', content curation must take place. There may be existing content from a site that is being redesigned, or copy that is being pulled from various places such as print collateral like catalogs or product packaging. Some of it, of course, may remain, however – the challenge is to rework the content so that it makes sense for the web, writing for SEO and enabling the ideal user pathways.

# OPTIMIZING USER EXPERIENCE



## DEVELOPMENT

Just as a backend team develops the code for the site, the content team is the first step in beginning the structure of that framework. From defining the top navigation and creating calls to action – the content is truly informing both the visual and structural design of the site.

Beginning a web design process with content strategy is a way to ensure that the brand will be shown in the most authentic and easy to understand way. When a design and content team work in tandem to create the framework for graphics and content, the user experience will be fully optimized.

Designers, marketers and business owners have a great deal to gain (and learn) from content strategy. A single sentence of copy can easily be ignored with a user scrolling right past, but if called out with the right mix of design and content implementations – it can be the key to conversion.

Whether digital media or print assets, beginning a design process with content strategy is a way to ensure that the brand will be shown in the most authentic and intuitive manner. When a design and content team work in tandem to create the framework for graphics and content, the user experience will be fully optimized.

Content strategy can take many forms, and a team may not even know they are tapping into its benefits – here are a few ways to take advantage of better user experience through content strategy methodologies.

## ASSET ASSESSMENT

In the beginning stages of content strategy, it's all about gathering. The coming together of the brand and creative team as well as the compilation and review of existing assets. This could include anything from print material to both current and archived pages on a website. A strategist works with the brand to define requirements of the information that will be presented including business goals, demographics and marketing strategy.

## INFORMATION ARCHITECTURE

Content strategy works in tandem with information architecture to create a better result. Information architecture is the outlining of a core navigation to help a user move successfully through a site. With the introduction of content strategy to this process, the user is equipped with a more refined language set, perhaps more tailored directly to the target user, allowing for a greater defining of the tonality of the brand.

## CONTENT HIERARCHY

Information should be broken down into clearly defined and digestible sections. Organize sections by how a user would search for the information – in this case – user pathway testing may be conducted. The most important information should be graphically highlighted in the first couple of sentences, with the supporting information to follow. In this case, headlines are the most important piece of the puzzle.

## CONTENT MAPPING

From user personas to the customer journey, mapping out where content will reside within the constraints of an interface is key to gaining conversions. Many times, content is optimized solely for the highly trafficked pages and often, only for the home or landing page. Following through an experience from top to bottom with consistent and timely messaging lends a sense of trust to the user and a better experience overall.

## TONALITY GUIDELINES

Establishing a brand voice is a critical element of engagement. Ensuring that the language is positioned appropriately, understandable and up to date is essential to connecting with an audience. This information can be found within a brand book, but content tonality has a tendency to get overlooked. Whether writing for social media, campaign taglines or creative assets – each channel or platform's content should be outlined prior to any publication for both internal and external users.

## CMS MANAGEMENT

Finding the right content management system (CMS) is an integral component to ensuring that a site will remain current, relevant and without error. If a website is the vehicle, then its CMS is the engine.

In addition to updating content, this is the hub to analyze data, understand patterns and identify areas that may need improvement, and for that matter – areas that are succeeding. Seek and provide ample training for the team that will be at the helm of the CMS, which will provide increased productivity and ROI.

It's clear that a content strategy will provide greater clarity of messaging, but many still need convincing. The bottom line is that a well thought out approach to content will make for a happier customer both on and offline – and who doesn't want that.

