



by Doug Knorr with Phil Callighan



Turn It Around

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WEBSITE "CONTENT" IS WORDS PLUS IMAGES, DESIGN, NAVIGATION AND FUNCTIONALITY.

There's a new cliché that says "Content is king" on the web. This is because the Internet is the only medium that allows the public to self-select what they want to view at their own convenience, 24/7. There is no schedule and no limit to the content they can choose.

No other medium can offer this ultimate flexibility and choice. And few customers are immune to browsing. For example, have you ever gone online to research a business-related topic and suddenly found yourself looking at something of personal interest like a car, sports results, or a movie trailer? Have you searched your own name or a friend's name to see what is being said about you or a friend online?

The point is — **even if you go online with a specific purpose in mind, it's easy to become distracted and click on an image or a story that catches your eye. You can go anywhere!**

That's why the content of your business' website must be interesting, and not just to you. The images and stories on the site must interest the many people you want to attract as customers.

"Content" is often considered to be just written words in HTML or another markup language that produces text that can be indexed easily by a search engine.

That's reasonable, because if someone doesn't know your

Quick pointers for website writing

Hundreds of furniture manufacturers and thousands of home furnishings retailers are competing for search-engine recognition on a global basis. Your competitors have been working on search-engine optimization and fine-tuning their websites for years. That's why it is not uncommon for "Ashley" or "IKEA" to come up first when people search "furniture."

To get in the game, you need to focus on producing content that will rank you among the top search results in your local target market. Your website must contain the local phrases and the original content that identifies you and your store brand — city or town names, county locations, a street name, an annual event you sponsor, a brand name or a family name that people in your area associate with you.



Here are other tips that make all the difference:

1. Write so that your content is easy to read.

Many shoppers these days are busy, distracted, tired or rushed. Don't use industry jargon. Be clear and inviting. Strive to inform, not impress. Make it easy for your reader to get your message. If a sixth-grader can understand your copy, you're on the right track.

2. Break your text up into logical chunks.

It's not true that "people today won't read a lot of copy." They will read a lot about a topic, BUT only if it's presented in short chunks, preferably on different pages. Don't post large amounts of text in a solid block a page wide and a page high. Instead, use paragraphs, sub-headlines, pictures or other visuals to break your content into manageable bites.

3. Write in headline-news style.

Make your text inviting with clear headlines, bullet points and text formatting such as boldface or a larger font size. Research indicates that boldface is much more readable than italic or all-capital letters when you want to emphasize something and make it stand out. But don't try to emphasize everything or nothing will have the impact you seek.

4. Write text with embedded links that point your website visitor to other sections of your site.

This will quickly take your visitor to other pages with additional details. It will also help with organic search.

5. Use a professional writer even if you think you don't need to.

Phil Callighan, senior account executive at Knorr Marketing, observes that, "Every reader is a critic. Very few are writers." Sure, you can write and so can your Webmaster, but can you or he sell your store, your products, your services in the most engaging, easy-to-read, persuasive way with the written word? A professional marketing communications or ad writer can. To contain costs, bid it on a project basis. It's part of your cost of sales. And those sales will be far more exciting if your Website content is a pleasure to read!

website URL, or doesn't bother committing it to "Favorite" status on their computer, your website will be accessed primarily by people searching keywords and keyword phrases on search engines like Google, Yahoo, Ask and AOL.

To guide people to your website, you must write text that incorporates keywords. The more closely keywords or keyword phrases on your website match what people are searching for, the higher the probability your site will be listed among the top search-engine results.

How can you choose keywords that shoppers will use? Think about your business from your customer's point of view. For example, you proudly say you are in the "home furnishings" business but the word "furniture" is a much more popular search term.

What does it matter? During the month of December, 2008, approximately 45.5 million people searched the term "furniture" on the Google search engine but only 1.22 million searched "home furnishings."

Skilled writing is critically important to effective website content (see sidebar). But to get the full effect, you'll need much more. Website content includes images, design, website navigation and functionality, all working together.

Content determines whether visitors stay on your site and review a lot of information about your store and the products you carry, or quickly click away.

Keeping visitors on your site for a minute or more is critical.



Your website content must be interesting, and not just to you.
The images and stories on the site must interest the many people you want to attract as customers.

Visits that last less than 10 seconds indicate the visitors probably didn't find what they were looking for, so they "bounced away" by clicking to another site.

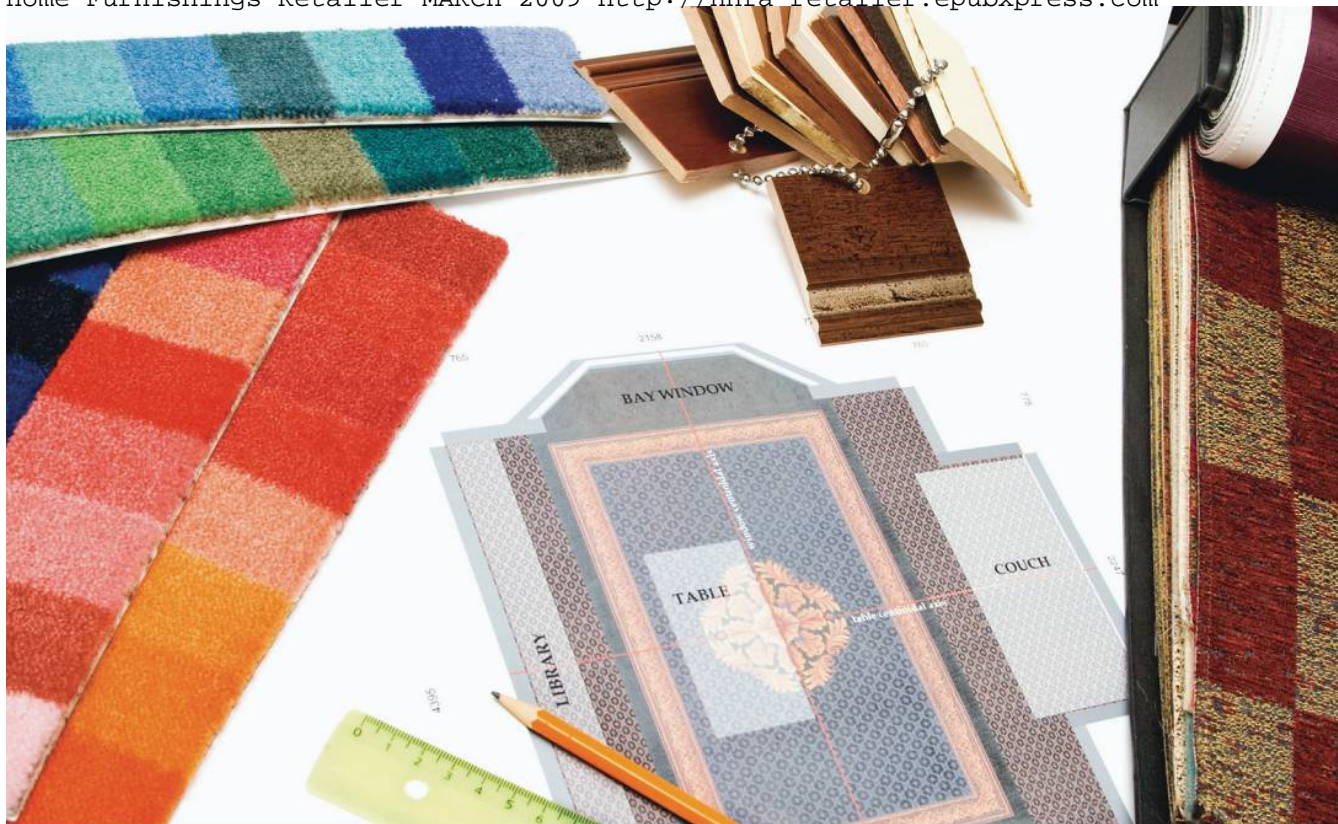
Length of visits to your website will give you a measure of your "bounce rate." **The longer visitors linger on your site, the higher the probability your site is generating a qualified sales lead.** This quality is called the

"stickiness" factor of a website.

Visitors stick to a website because of content that provides:

- useful information
- entertainment
- interaction
- all of the above.

In creating a dynamic website, you'll be doing many things that are new to you, but here's one that isn't. **To start your website content out right, use the same or**



Harness the power of **TESTIMONIALS**

"Our kids love their new beds and the new desks make it easy to do homework."

— Emily W., Vero Beach, FL

"My new sofa is so beautiful, I'm looking for excuses to have company!"

— Sheila E., Rochester, N.Y.

similar imagery or design on your website that you use in traditional media. It will instantly reassure visitors that they are at the right place. They will feel comfortable and "at home."

Navigation (what words are on the buttons that take viewers around your site and how they work) and the functionality (what happens depending on what the customer does on your site) of your website communicate the useful information, entertainment or interaction you can deliver. This is where you must ask, "What will interest *my* prospects and customers?"

Providing information about the manufacturers' brands and products you carry is certainly important. Product education for consumers is essential. If you don't create (or commission) your own content to explain differences in furniture construction, fabrics, leather or furniture care, you need to

provide links to websites that do offer it.

When the chief objective of your website is to encourage a store visit, it is important to ask yourself, "How will I substantiate my store's brand promise?" and "What can I do to engage my website visitor in meaningful dialog?"

For starters, if you don't have customer testimonials already on your website, add them. Make customer testimonials a navigation choice. (That means put "Customer Testimonials" or something similar on a button viewers can go right to).

Testimonials provide credibility and support for your brand promise. You don't need to use full names; customer initials and their town name is adequate identification. (Do be sure to keep the complete testimonial letter or email in your files, however.) Take advantage of the fact that websites, unlike most other media, can be

interactive. Pull those thank-you notes out of the file and put them on your website. Customer product reviews are an important type of user-generated content that greatly enhances your store's credibility.

How important are customer-generated product reviews on a website? A majority of shoppers rely on them. According to a Deloitte Consumer Product Group-sponsored study conducted in 2007, **62 percent of Internet users read product reviews written by other consumers**, and more than eight in 10 respondents in the Deloitte study said that the reviews they read affected their buying intentions. Either they became more determined to buy the product or they changed their minds and bought a different product.

In a separate study conducted in 2007 by Deloitte with Sterling Commerce, 42 percent of online shoppers in the U.S. thought that featuring consumer reviews on websites increased consumer trust in the sites.

Pat Conroy, vice-chairman and U.S. consumer products group leader at Deloitte & Touche U.S.A. observed, "In the past, clever marketers and advertisers shaped brands, but now consumers are increasingly empowered, everyone has a voice, and information and opinions are instantly dispersed."



On one search engine in one month, **more than 45 million people searched the term "furniture,"** compared to fewer than 2 million who searched "home furnishings." To find the right keywords, think about your business the way your customer does!

What does that mean to you? Make the information on your website transparent. Don't brag and boast; if customers don't back you up, your claims are suspect.

What else can you do to make your site interactive, functional and responsive? Consider room-planning software or a link to such a program. When consumers attempt to design their room on their own, they may convince themselves that they need professional design help.

Include a section on answers to Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs). A well-thought-out FAQ section can cut down on the time your sales or service staff spends answering routine questions such as, "What are your store hours?" or "What days and times do you deliver?" It also provides an opportunity to tell customers about the most important aspects of your brand promise, your sales or service guarantees and other aspects



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. How soon can I get custom upholstery delivered?
2. What will you do if my order arrives scratched?
3. Can I get help in planning my room?

of your business that they need to know and that differentiate you from your competition.

Another productive navigation choice is to highlight your current promotions. Visitors should be able to download your print ads, circulars, and direct mailers or play your broadcast commercials. Feature brief product videos or videos that showcase your store's unique merchandising ambience and service philosophy as well as products.

Retailers know they shouldn't try to put everything into one ad, but it's a temptation. Having a good website may help you do a cleaner, more persuasive job


with your print ads. You might advertise only a low-cost price leader or two in a newspaper ad or a direct mailer and drive traffic to your website to see additional special offers.

What about commercials? You can reach many more consumers than you ever thought possible! According to eMarketer, two-thirds of Internet users watched online video ads in 2008 and they predict more than four out of five Internet users will watch online video ads in 2012. According to comScore, a leading Internet information provider that focuses on consumer behavior insights, the number of online shoppers who watched *retail*

videos grew 40 percent in a single year.

How else can you involve your visitors in your site? Create an e-club and invite website visitors to join. Ask visitors to provide you their names and email addresses in return for receiving advance notice of store promotions, special online-only promotional offers, news about the latest home furnishings trends and furniture care tips. Building an e-club will enable you to survey your members, test promotions and learn their level of interest in different merchandise categories.

Once you have a fair number of email addresses to work with, think about replacing some of your customer snail-mailings with e-mailings. No printing costs. No postage. No mail fulfillment fees. (Important: Be sure to include copy that indicates you are emailing this consumer because she expressed interest through some other earlier contact, but if she wants to stop receiving your emails, she can. Set up your website system so that an easy click will get her name removed; talk to the professionals on how to word and design this opt-out function.) Most of all, day in and day out, with frequent (weekly or, better yet, more often) content changes, make your site inviting and then engaging to your targeted website visitor.

When your website makes content king, you rule! 

Thinking of Closing? Think the Lynch Sales Company.

"It was my goal to close my family owned and operated business after 48 years with integrity, and in a dignified manner, with due respect to our valued employees and clients... I appreciate and compliment Lynch Sales for providing the direction necessary to successfully accomplish the monumental job of closing a business."

Deborah Leonard, President
Marlborough Barn Distinctive Home Furnishings
Marlborough, CT
September 15, 2008

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