

Best Practices to Demonstrate a Unique Web Personality

A common theme heard again and again as I was doing research for my book *Cashing in with Content: How innovative marketers use digital information to turn browsers into buyers* is the importance of creating a distinct, consistent, and memorable site personality, which can often be attributed to the tone or voice of its content.

As visitors interact with the content on your site, they should develop a clear picture of the organization behind the site. Is it young and playful or solid and conservative?

Here are some best practices to demonstrate a unique personality on the Web:

Best Practice # 1 > Establish a site personality

For some organizations, a site might be specifically conceived to have a playful and humorous tone intended to build an amicable relationship with site visitors. Web site visitors aren't nameless faceless numbers; they're people like you and me. Most people like a bit of humor here and there and many sites make use of the lighter side of content as an important personality component.

Best Practice # 2 > Carry your offline personality to your Web site

Defining and maintaining personality, voice, and tone is just as important for established companies with offline brands as it is for online-only upstarts. However, the existence of an offline business means there's less room for creating something new online, though it may also provide an established personality that can be used as a starting point.

Best Practice # 3 > Write for people visiting four the first time... and for the hundredth

Keep in mind that Web site visitors may be well-educated (or at least well-informed) in their areas of interest and may have visited your site many times. Or they may come to your site knowing little or nothing at all. Marketers who produce content for the Web need to take audience-members' knowledge into consideration and create content accordingly.

Best Practice # 4 > Consistency is critical

Whatever the personality, the way to achieve consistency is to make certain that all of the written material and other content on the site conform to a defined tone that has been established from the start. Although this might seem easier for companies with a dedicated content creation team, there are often overlooked content components of a site like error messages, help files, and FAQ sections. It is important that even relatively mundane site content speaks with one voice. A strong focus on site personality and character pays off. As visitors come to rely on the content found on your site, they will develop an intellectual, emotional, and personal relationship with your organization. A Web site can evoke a familiar and trusted voice, just like that of a friend on the other end of the telephone. This way, users will know from experience who's speaking and welcome the interaction. A site must accomplish this through its tone and style. Just like the welcome and familiar phone call, well-executed Web site content will be perceived as a trusted friend and resource.