Chapter 19

Reader–Centric Writing for a Prosumer Market: Effectively Using Professional Writers to Create and Maintain Content and Metadata in Digital Media

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ABSTRACT

In the creation of online marketing sites, it is common for the site to be well underway before any writers are introduced to the project. Sometimes writers are not introduced to the project until the site is actually designed and developed, the writer expected to add content after the fact and to an alien architecture. In the case of complex information systems, sometimes no writer is involved at all. In this chapter, the authors do three things. First, they make the claim that there are three kinds of writing demanded by the Internet: user-centric, persuasion-centric, and quality-centric. Together, they make up a package called “reader-centric writing.” Furthermore, the authors suggest that in writing for the prosumer, quality-centric and persuasion-centric are as common and perhaps more important than user-centric, and a competent professional writer thoroughly immersed in the skills necessary for producing the full spectrum of reader-centric writing should be involved in the production of these texts from the very beginning of the project. Secondly, toward supporting the above argument, the authors present examples in Complex and Complicated Information Systems (CCISs) where developers with an incomplete understanding of the issues discussed produce egregious problems that go unnoticed for years. Finally, based on the above claims, the authors show how excellent writers are in position to make valuable contributions to content quality, metadata quality, landing page optimization, search engine optimization, and return on investment, particularly when producing Websites for audiences as demanding as prosumers.

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INTRODUCTION

As you deal with the issues of developing a Web-site designed to market a product or idea, how do you know the content is going do what you want it to? How do you know the proposed architecture of the site supports the purpose of the content? For that matter, how do you know what content will be needed? Finally, if the site is complex or complicated with input provided by contributors outside your control, how to you maintain quality of content?

As we answer these questions, we will demonstrate how common these problems are across the Internet in well known and respected and well known and not so respected complex and complicated (CCIS) sites. And we will present a rubric that permits you to effectively evaluate content quality even if you are not a writer or editor by nature. Finally, we will propose a model for effectively using a writer/editor for creating and maintaining content and supportive metadata and will describe that ideal writer/editor.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Terms like prosumer have a variety of meanings, which means that saying “prosumer” invokes a wide variety of different audiences. Other terms such as complex and complicated information systems are relatively new and narrow in scope. Finally, there are terms we have developed as a part of my research (persuasion-centric and quality-centric) that have relatively narrow meaning and (because they are so new) are not in common use anywhere. While we are confident that many IT professionals know and use many of the terms we present, there may be some who would find descriptions useful.

Prosumer

There are three common definitions of prosumer. The first, oldest, and most common, describes producer/consumers (Kotler, 2013). These are people who “can be found making their own clothes, cooking their own food, rearing their own cars, and hanging their own wallpaper” (p. 510).

A second definition (Konczal, 2013) describes a professional/consumer, a person who “becomes involved in the design and manufacturing of products and services, so they can be made to individual specification” (p. 4). A new variation of this group is made up of content users on the Internet who are also content producers (e.g., bloggers).

In a more recent definition (Gerhardt, 2008), a prosumer is that very selective buyer “who makes no distinction between his or her home and work lives. The prosumer engages in activities belonging to either sphere, regardless of time or location” (p. 1). In this regard, when she buys a tool or service, it will be equally suitable for either sphere.

Prosumers in Digital and Physical Worlds

There is currently a great deal of interest in the marketplace in how prosumers use electronic services and devices (e.g., entertainment, laptops, Internet connectivity, etc.), but these people are real and despite the fact they spend a great deal of time on the Internet, they have real lives and buy real things. Unfortunately, the marketplace is often not ready for them or the way they shop and a great deal of attention needs to be paid to that problem.