

## Creative Content Sells! Adding Humor is Easy, Cost-effective, and Sets Your Website Apart

Creative content keeps users coming back. Not special effects, flash animation, or fancy demos. Really.

So before you go the expensive route, realize there are many ways to add high-impact, low-cost creative content to your site that will work. Ask yourself how important these expensive media are to your business: will they keep users coming back and will they yield the return on investment you need? For a few websites, those tools might be worth it, but for most sites they add little to the user experience. And in some cases, they are downright distracting – just extras that add noise.

Marketing messages are easily lost in a noisy world. Creative humor cuts through that noise and adds value if done consistently. My prescription is the 4C's approach: Customer focus, Copy, Content, and Cartoons.

Before you start, ask yourself:

- ❑ What messages do I want to send about my services, products, company?
- ❑ Who are my customers? How do I add value for these users?
- ❑ What do I want users to be able to do, read, buy, etc., on my site?
- ❑ What is my point of difference and how can I use creative content to underscore it?

Once you are clear on your goals, there are many easy, effective ways to add humor with the Four C's.

- ❑ **Customer-focus:** is your site focused on you or your customer? Your website isn't for you. It's for your visitors. Your site needs to answer the WIIFM or "what's in it for me (the customer)?" question quickly. On your *home page* describe what you do briefly, then jump into the challenges your customers face and how you help (your benefits). Many sites fail the home page WIIFM test. If a customer can't answer that in 15 seconds, they are long gone. Wouldn't you be?

What issues are important to your customer? Make sure your content is for the benefit of your target market. What you should be asking is, "how can I present this in an engaging way for them?" What makes my site compelling? Once you know this, you can begin to add humor. Humor must be relevant to your audience, and if your site isn't customer-centric, humor will fall flat.

- ❑ **Copy quantity, quality and tone:** is your site friendly, engaging and relevant to your intended audience? Is it fun and light-hearted where applicable? Ask customers for honest assessments of your website: what works and what doesn't. A site should make users want to come back! Also consider:
  - Is there too much copy? If your pages require more than one scroll, you have too much. A web page should be no more than 1 *printed* page ideally. Use no more than 2 sentences to describe what you do on the home page. Remember, it's not about you.
  - Is copy easy to read? You need crisp writing. Occasional bullets are OK, but less is more. Dense prose and large paragraphs won't be read. Sorry poets, most users eyeball looking for relevant words and make a quick "stay or go" decision based on WIIFM.
  - Is copy impactful or painfully dull? For example, for a recent client, we added a little light-hearted humor on each page of her website. Instead of, "We do marketing. Check out our portfolio (snoozer!)," we used creative, snappy copy to grab attention: "Great marketing is a conversation starter. Let's talk!" Or instead of "Upcoming Events," you can add some light-hearted punch: "Where in the world is Speaker X these days. Lots of places near you!" What makes you smile and how can you add this element to your site? This costs nothing but creativity and a little time. Well worth the investment!

- ❑ **Creative Content:** What keeps users coming back? What will they do on your site?

Engage your customer in a dialogue. Be creative. There are many ways to do that with humor in ways that add value for your user and make you stand out from the crowd:

- Quizzes/self-assessments
- Top-10 lists
- Downloadable MP3's or a radio show that's fun but also informative on a topic
- Humorous news headlines or stories that are relevant to your market
- Customer case studies that are fun to read
- Polls or blogs
- Jokes of the week – relevant to your industry
- Articles full of valuable “how-to” tips written in a fun, engaging tone!
- Newsletters or contests

How are you helping your customers manage and grow their businesses? Be generous with information and find creative ways to add value to this content so users come back. That means consistency. So if you haven't updated your site in a while, it may be keeping customers away. Fresh, relevant, snappy and up-to-date content drives repeat usage. Think about your own website usage patterns.

- **Cartoons:** Pictures are worth a thousand words and then some. That's why cartoons get their own category. Cartoons on your site help you relate to your audience – and more importantly, allow them to relate to you. For example, if you are a financial planner, you can use a cartoon on your site to convey to your audience that you understand the frustrations of financial planning in uncertain economic times. A cartoon I saw recently on a website had the following caption: “If I take an early death, and a late retirement, I just might squeak by!” That got my attention on a serious issue (the importance of planning), and made me laugh, rather than hitting me over the head with the same, undifferentiated message: “you must plan early.” We're used to hearing certain messages ad nauseum, so we tune out. A cartoon that makes you laugh also makes you think. It cuts through the noise, entertains, and educates. Moreover, the website that uses cartoons to “ease” the pain of dealing with tough issues, also communicates that it has a sense of humor. That's my kind of company! Personable and customer-oriented.

By leveraging the Four C's - Customer-focus, Copy, Content, and Cartoons – any business can create compelling websites that keep users coming back. That's the key to return on investment. Here's to many happy “returns” – for you *and* your users.

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