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Expert Talk
Simple & Effective Writing for the Web

IIDM
INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE
OF DIRECTORS & MANAGERS

The International Institute of Directors and Managers (IIDM) is a 24/7 global centre of learning, providing the latest in management development and thought leadership from around the world.

Writing content for a website is different to writing for the print media.

The IIDM website places great importance on the content quality of its website. To write top-notch content that will get noticed on the web, IIDM provides the following tips:

Understand the readers

Websites attract readers from around the world. Whenever possible, avoid being overly regional in your focus.
Know the readers and meet their needs, not your own business or promotional needs.
Content should be written concisely, can be scanned (rather than read). Avoid marketing hype, and over-use of narratives or commentary.
The article should encourage the reader and, where necessary, how to take action.

Organise the content

Core content features tell readers what to expect, is concise (edit out unnecessary text), is scannable, is independent of other information / articles, is objective and up-to-date.
Decide on one topic per article - and stick to it.
Plan, plan, plan before you write. Work out what you want to say, then say it - jotting down 5-9 key points can assist in this process. Use the 5Ws - who, what, why, where (how) and when.

Lead paragraph, introduction or grabber

Ideally one or two sentences - a total of 25-45 words.
This lead paragraph should compel the reader to continue to read the entire article.
Clearly inform the reader what topic / issue the article will explore and outcomes for the reader.

Use headings and sub-headings

Both headings and sub-headings should be descriptive and tell the story.
Headings describe the main content and tell your audience what to expect.
Sub-headings describe each chunk of content and should draw the reader's attention.

Paragraphs, sentences, lists, instructions and words

Paragraphs should be short - between 70-100 words.
Each new paragraph is to be the start of a new idea.
Short sentences and simple words are to be used.
Avoid foreign phrases, jargon and clichés - think of an everyday equivalent.
Use action-orientated words and use the active voice.
Lists are used to focus the reader on facts. Use less than nine items in a list, ideally 5-6 items.
Break each instruction into simple actions. Show your instructions to someone; can they understand it?

Diagrams, graphics, images, tables etc.

Avoid using poor quality, detailed or complex diagrams etc.
Over-use of diagrams etc. can drastically slow down the loading of web pages.

Links within the article

Where article sub-headings are listed, click-through links can be established to move the reader directly to each sub-heading. Such links can assist quick and easy reading.
Links to information on external websites should be avoided as such links are activated at the sole discretion of IIDM.