

CREATE WEB CONTENT THAT SELLS!

**Wow your market with
writing strategies,
search engine hints,
and graphic tips
that work.**

Reneé Kennedy

Terry Kent

The Write Market

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INTRODUCTION

Who is this book for?

Are you ready to build an effective Web site that sells? One that brings in serious prospects? Then *Create Web Content That Sells!* is for you. It's a tutorial about writing effectively for Web visitors, creating a useable site structure, getting a marketing mind-set, and choosing practical graphics for your Web site.

Whether your site sells wrenches to left-handed mechanics, offers landscaping services, or strives to cultivate loyalty in the hearts of your existing customers, the basic tenet of great Web content is universal: *speak to your audience*. And *Create Web Content That Sells!* shows you how to get down and dirty, one-to-one, with your audience, through writing, structure, and graphics.

Small business people need every edge they can get, so we designed our marketing section to fit this need. Plus, any-

one involved in content development will find the writing section extremely valuable.

You've found the ideal book if you want a site that will:

1. Sell products.
2. Sell services.
3. Brand your product or business.
4. Improve your image.
5. Make every point clear and concise.
6. Publish your writing or art work.

What this book will do for you

Content boils down to two main areas: copy (words or text) and graphics (pictures, clip art, navigational clip art, scans, etc.). And marketing is integral to copy and graphics.

Create Web Content That Sells! is based on a “marketing approach.” After studying it, you'll know how to write and think from a marketing perspective.

Writing for the Web is unlike any other type of writing. Our book offers terrific techniques to help you write Web pages that sell. We'll teach you how to energize your Web site content so people will buy your stuff.

Graphic design for the Web is also different than other art mediums. We teach you how to choose professional graphic elements that complement your offerings.

Your writing and your graphics should go together like peanut butter and jelly. The writing is the peanut butter

and the graphics are the jelly (in case you were wondering). You need the peanut butter: that's the protein. You can do without the jelly, but it sure does taste good! And with the right combination of flavors, you *can* sell on the Web.

Take the ideas in this book and put them into motion. In so doing, you'll be on your way to developing a writing style that sells. You will also discover what kinds of graphics will enhance your words.

What this book won't do for you

We don't teach HTML, the art of graphic design, or the technical aspects of Web design. We touch on Web usability, but we're not going to delve into it too deeply. There are excellent resources on Web usability, HTML, scripting, and how to use various programs that can improve the graphics on your site. At the end of the book, we provide resources and a *great* glossary.

We are also assuming that you already have a product or service that you wish to present on a Web site.

We're not going to get into a lot of theory, either. There's *some* theory, but you can take it or leave it. The meat of *Create Web Content That Sells!* is how to develop content for the Web.

Who “we” are

Renee’s Slant

Throughout the book, you will see references to “we.” For instance, “We did this...,” or “We suggest that...”

We are two women who decided one day to start designing Web sites. The decision was simple; the reality is a never-ending journey filled with trials as well as accomplishments.

In 1996, Terry Kent, co-author of this book (also my business partner), kept talking about things called *The Internet* and *Email*. I ignored her for a long time. After all, a good computer was expensive. She kept touting the benefits of email and how we could stay in touch. I chalked all that up to the fact that she was a computer geek.

In 1997, I began searching for a job I could do at home. I had three small children and hated the rat race of a “real job.” I’d held a variety of jobs: editor, writer, English teacher, tutor, and sales manager, along with a number of squalid, lowly positions.

By early 1998, my father had begun planting the idea in my head that I could design Web sites, and that designing Web sites was easy. He’s a computer geek of the highest magnitude: a programmer. He even gave me his old 486 Compaq computer. I’d never had a computer with that much power! “Why not give it a try,” I thought. “Maybe Dad was right!”

I began telling all my friends and relatives I was going to start an Internet business and sell Web design services. Most said, “Yeah right.” I had the distinct feeling no one believed I could do it.

To add to my angst, Terry gave me her email address over the phone. She kept saying, “It’s tgkent *at* earthlink dot com. You know, the *at* sign. The dot is a period.” I had *no clue* as to what she was talking about, but I wrote the address down on a small scrap of paper, something like this: t g kent at Earthlink.com

Not to be dissuaded, I hooked up my computer, paid for a really bad Internet Service Provider, and quickly learned what the @ sign was. That same week, I picked up a copy of *Sam’s Teach Yourself HTML in 24 Hours*, and within 24 hours I sat down, faced my computer, and started designing my own business Web site. The result? Pathetic, to say the least.

About a week into the process, I came across a new barrier. I realized I couldn’t design a button for the life of me. Now proficient with the @ sign, I emailed Terry, and said, “Help!”

I’ve known Terry for about 30 eons and she’s been a graphic designer for about 20 eons. She was my biggest supporter and after that first email, she decided she wanted in on the business. I remember her insisting, “We’ll make this work: you’ve got to be hungry and you’re hungry, right?” I was starved, and wanted nothing more than to be able to write, to be published, and to be read. Terry had the same yearnings in her field of graphic art.

Together, *we* are a great team. We've designed over 30 Web sites. Some of them are still out there; some are long gone. We've made mistakes; we've had successes. This book—in a sense—takes you on our journey. We'll show you our mistakes and achievements, and you will benefit from them...promise!

Stay tuned to our Web site to continue to follow our story and learn more about Web writing and design.

Write on,
Renee Kennedy
rkennedy@thewritemarket.com

Terry's Slant

Once Renee got online, and I'd satisfied the urge to stay in constant contact with her (man, how the Internet has made some things easier and cheaper), she began talking about doing this Web design stuff as a business. I realized I *was* hungry. Hungry to learn something new...hungry for the chance to be more creative. And to do it for myself, not for someone else.

Isn't that the dream of every small business owner: to be the CEO of a successful company and have everyone work for them, instead of always working for others? Call me greedy, but I wanted to be the boss.

I've done years of pre-press, years of design. And yes, I'm a computer geek. (To think I flunked my first computer class all those eons ago! "These will never catch on," I thought.)

I've always yearned for something I'd have more control over. When Renee approached me about doing Web design, I thought long and hard for about two seconds, then said, "I'm in!"

Our business grows every year, and we learn something every time we sit at our computers. Not always willingly, mind you. Ask Renee how many times I've sat here almost literally kicking and screaming, "I don't get it and I don't want to!" Not a good student, me. But once I've learned something, I don't forget it.

That's what this book is for: so *you* won't have to go through the process while kicking and screaming. Hopefully, we've figured out the hard stuff for you.

Also, we've searched long and hard and haven't found a book that approaches Web design quite this way: from the marketing standpoint. Anybody can learn HTML. But it's a *lot* of work to put your site together so it works as a successful sales tool.

We decided to pack all our advertising and marketing knowledge—as it applies to the Internet—into *Create Web Content That Sells!*

Renee and I make a great team. Between us we have tons of online business experience, we can show you how to create a killer site.

Terry Kent
tkent@thewritemarket.com

A bit about style

This book is written from a first person perspective. Most of the time, I will be doing the writing (I'm Renee). If Terry writes, I'll make sure you know she's the one gabbing at you.

Sometimes, what we say about marketing will seem harsh, almost inappropriate. For instance, we talk about "hooking" people and we talk about your customers as "targets." The words we use may sound more like we're sending you on a hunting or fishing expedition than on a journey toward customer fulfillment. Don't be upset if this leaves you a bit confused. Stay with us.

It's harsh reality time. You need to start getting a mind-set that pulls people in. You must do everything in your power (that's legal) to get your Web site in front of people and to get what you want from those people. It's all about persuasion.

We are not suggesting sleazy or sneaky ways of doing things; in fact we abhor those methods. *Create Web Content That Sells!* is dedicated to showing you ways to improve your Web content without using unethical methods. Nuff said. On with the show...

GET INTO A MARKETING MIND-SET

Introduction

Before I say anything about marketing, let me give you the best bit of advice in this entire book. If you offer a service, *you must enjoy providing that service*. If you offer a product, *you must fully believe in the product*. You must be committed to your services and/or products. If you don't have at least *that* much invested, you'll have a hard time persuading other people to take an interest.

This section of the book helps you develop a marketing mind-set. If you're trying to sell anything on the Web, whether it be products, services, or a business image, sit down and think about who you're selling to and what it is you're selling them.

Even if you're not selling anything (maybe you just want to put up a business Web site to make your home-based business look more professional), you should still consider

your audience and the image you want to portray.

Offline selling

Take a look at two current offline selling methods. These are proven methods used in direct, offline selling (these are methods you'd use in "the real world"):

Minor Sale

Method for selling an *inexpensive product* that *won't* require a future relationship with the seller (vacuum cleaners, encyclopedias, magazines, calculators, donuts, etc.):

- 1. Open:** Find a way to relate to the customers. The initial statements would involve how the product will directly benefit the consumer. Get the customers thinking they may *need* this product.
- 2. Investigate:** Ask questions to find out exactly what the consumers need.
- 3. Give Benefits and Features:** Explain how each product's feature gives the consumers benefits based on what they need. (Features are what the product does. Benefits are how the product touches the consumer in an emotional way. We'll discuss the ins and outs of benefits and features throughout the book.)
- 4. Handle Objections:** During the sale, overcome any objections. The consumer may have questions and concerns, and the salesperson is there to redirect and overcome the consumer's doubts.
- 5. Close:** After the customer has seen the benefits and features, it's time to ask for the sale or "close." There are several types of closing lines like, "Shall I put that on your credit card, or do you want to pay

cash?” A close is a simple one-liner that gives the customer a perceived choice. “Would you like that in blue or red?” The implication is that they are prepared to buy.

Major Sale

Method for selling an *expensive product* that *will* require an ongoing relationship between the seller and the buyer (Web design services, onsite training services, intranet for a large company, etc.):

- 1. Open:** Introductions between customer and salesperson. Seller establishes himself as the person asking the questions.
- 2. Investigate:** Explore the customer’s dissatisfaction and problems. Ask questions that will bring the buyer to a level of awareness where she sees that she has some serious problems. Ask questions that get the buyer to describe what benefits would solve her problems.
- 3. Give Benefits:** After the salesperson has brought out the serious problems and needs of the buyer—and the buyer has admitted to serious needs—the salesperson presents the benefits of the product or service that will solve the needs of the buyer.
- 4. Close:** Advance the sale forward by obtaining a definite commitment on the part of the consumer. In a major sale, involving a first-time sales call, this isn’t going to focus on the sale itself, but perhaps to set up another meeting or to arrange for a product demonstration. However, there must be *some* type of commitment made by the consumer, not just, “Okay, we’ll be in touch with you after we think about it.”

With these two types of offline selling methods in mind, here are some important facts about Web selling:

1. On the Web, the salesperson is not present; selling is done through writing.
2. You cannot show enthusiasm through your tone of voice or body language. You cannot wiggle your way out of something, once it is in writing. Writing is much different than speaking, and your message must be relayed through words, punctuation, style of writing, fonts, pictures, etc.
3. There is no chance for any type of investigative questioning of a specific consumer. The salesperson cannot be there to ask and answer questions.
4. On the Web you do not have a way to overcome your visitors' specific objections as they come up (because you are not present.)
5. You need to prepare questions, answers, possible objections, and solutions *in advance*.
6. The traditional "closer" may not work. Closing or advancing to the next step will be possible, but not through traditional one-liners. People are not easily manipulated when reading about a product. They have more time to think than when in a traditional sales setting.

What are your goals?

No matter what you want to achieve with your site, it must first get a reaction from your visitors. Which of the following goals are you trying to meet with your site?

1. **Minor Sale:** The goal of a smaller sale is to get visitors to decide, on the spot, to make a purchase.

There doesn't have to be a future relationship between your company and the customers. First, you present the major benefits and get them emotionally involved. Then you rack up a nice list of features, give them more benefits for each feature, hit them with a good price, and they will buy. They rationalize, "I need this: it has all these cool features, low price, no commitment, and low risk, so I'm buying. Now." With the minor sale, you are not in the business of forming "relationships," but are in the business of selling your product.

- 2. Major Sale:** In a major sale, you must form a lasting relationship with your customer. On the Web, during a first visit, it's different than offline, but there are certain things you can do to begin forming a lasting relationship. Reach out to your visitors. Get them to act in small ways that won't commit them to anything too serious, but that will get them to take part in forming the relationship.

There are many ways visitors might respond: email, phone calls, fax messages, filling out a Web form, or sending smoke signals. Provide them with several methods for contacting you, so they can choose the method they're most comfortable with.

Your goals should be crystal clear. Every word and image on the Web site must be geared to spur your visitor to take part in reaching your goals. Write down every goal you have for your site.

Why do people buy?

In any sale, the "logical" and the "emotional" decisions

behind a purchase are tied together. For the sake of learning to write about your product or services on your Web site, look at your offering from these two perspectives:

Features: What the product does, and its physical, touchable details. (Our lightweight bicycle pump and repair kit can be attached directly to your bike.)

Benefits: A statement *about* the product that evokes an emotion from the customer. (Therefore, buying our product means you never have to go through the pain of walking your bike 10 miles to find a repair kit.)

The customer isn't thinking about the words "benefits" and "features," but as a salesperson, you may want to make that distinction. It helps you write about your product. In your writing, back up the features by giving the benefits associated with each one. Present a feature and describe why that particular feature benefits the customer.

Start to examine the ads around you: on TV, in stores, on flyers mailed to your home, and in phone books and newspapers. What pulls you in? Why do you buy? Think about *your* motivations for buying products or services. Look at the relationships between price, features and benefits.

Turn on the TV and watch a home shopping program for about 30 minutes, then tell me that nothing pulls you in or tugs at you just a little. Surely *something* reached you! I find myself totally mesmerized by some of these commercials. The ring with the 24-karat gold setting and the ruby cut in 75 different ways to ensure maximum sparkle is sure to be a sensation at my next office Christmas party.

(I don't ever intend to go to an office Christmas party, but that's beside the point.) That ring just looks so tasty.

When I go into my local home improvement store, I never fail to walk out with \$100 worth of "stuff." When I get home, I look in the bag and wonder why I felt I needed these products. What made me buy? *Perceived need*. I need to make my house look better. I need functionality. I need to keep up with the Joneses.

While you study the ads around you and examine your own buying motives, also realize that the Web is a markedly different medium than traditional TV, print advertising, and the "brick and mortar" store. One of the major differences is in the way people will *find* your offerings.

The Web is huge. In order to find products on the Internet, you have to know what you're looking for. Do people just "happen" across a site and decide to buy? Probably not. They've usually "searched" for a particular site and/or a particular product.

Here's an example that may get you thinking about how and why people buy on the Web:

Recently, my husband and I decided to buy a piece of crystal online as a gift for his mother. We already knew we wanted Waterford Crystal. (There wasn't going to be any impulse buying. We knew exactly what we wanted and how much we wanted to spend. Now we had to find a site that sold it.) We went to our favorite search engine, Google, typed in the keywords "Waterford crystal," and

came up with links to about 92,000 sites. We went to the first few and settled on “House of Ireland.” The site was decent, professional, and easy to navigate. They had a secure server. I’d never purchased from them before, but I felt sure I’d heard something good about them. Those four elements gave House of Ireland enough credibility to satisfy any trust issues:

- Professional.
- Easy to navigate.
- Secure server.
- Had heard something good about them (referral).

So we only had to decide which item we wanted. We shopped the site for about 10 minutes. We decided based on the price and the item itself. Product photos were essential. If the site hadn’t offered them, we would never have bothered. We wanted to see what we were getting. We were already sold on the Waterford brand, so product quality wasn’t an issue.

In the above example, both emotional and logical thinking played a part in our decision-making process. Throughout the buying process, the benefits and features of the product led us to the purchase. The emotional/logical and benefits/features are all tied together. During the process they were inextricable from each other, unless we specifically tried to break them down. Two examples:

1. We used logic to go to a site that had a secure server.
2. We used emotion to choose the item, because the Waterford brand implies quality.

Try this! Go purchase something online (make sure the vendor has a secure server!). After you've done this, analyze each step of the process. Examine what you felt, what you did, and what made you finally decide to purchase. Think about it from the standpoint of emotions (benefits) and logic (features).

To make sound decisions on how many pages you will create that discuss the benefits and features of your product, you must think about your target market. You must know that market like the back of your hand.

The exercises in the next section will give you the opportunity to think about your target market, and your product's benefits and features.

Market research

Doing market research helps you discover what your potential customers want, need, or believe. You learn who you should be marketing to, and how to market to them. Market research can give valuable insight into how you'll write your Web pages and how to choose the right graphics.

If you had to hire someone to do market research, you'd spend a lot of money. If you run a small business, chances are you can't afford market research. However, what you *can* learn is the process of how professional marketing firms conduct market research. Once you understand this process, you can conduct your own research at a different level. Below, I'll outline the process and provide examples of how we conducted our market research. While we didn't spend a lot of money, we did spend time examining our

market and how we could improve our Web site, based on our analysis.

Here's the process:

A. Establish and write down your research goals.

What do you want to find out about your target market? ("Target market" is a phrase meaning the people you are selling to.) Goals might involve demographic information about your target market, the brands your target market currently use, or their perceptions of your product. Try to be specific when you write your goals. It makes your data collection easier.

Example: I'll admit that when Terry and I began our Web design business, we were fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants marketers. (And I'm not ashamed to admit that, because we've learned a lot and have come a long way.) We had no idea what market research was. We did, however, have the sense to sit down and talk about who we wanted to sell our services to and who we thought would buy our services. We also wrote all this information into our business plan.

In the first month our Web site was up, we had several inquiries into our services, and landed two accounts. At that point, we *really* started to figure out who it was we were marketing to. In the processes of dealing with our clients, we naturally started to collect information about our target market.

I'm not suggesting that you do the same. You'll be better off if you do your market research *before* you design your Web site. Write down what you want to

find out about your potential customers. Write down your perceptions of these people and who *you* think they are. Then go out and collect some real information about these people, using the following strategies.

B. Collect information.

(Note: we're only including the two research methods that are feasible for small businesses. There are other methods, however they can be costly and out of reach for a small business. Visit thewritemarket.com/links.htm to learn more about these other methods.)

1. Literature searches: Review all relevant and accessible reading material about your product and your industry.
 - a. Use search engines to find e-books and articles related to your industry and product.
 - b. Visit your competitors' sites to see how they market their products.
 - c. Participate in discussion lists, forums, and online chats that center around your industry and/or your product.
 - d. Subscribe to newsletters that discuss your industry.
 - e. Read newspapers for current information.
 - f. Read books for information and to get a feel for trends.
2. Survey/Interview: The survey is probably the quickest and cheapest method of research. It is ideal for small business. Also, interviewing current customers and listening to their problems will help in future marketing endeavors. For more