The Art and Necessity of Writing Long Content

Writing long content, such as feature articles, reports and studies, may be a dying art. While minimalist web designs require brief content and web writers focus on search engine pleasing text, it is ironic that Google rewards longer and more meaningful content and readers are clamoring for it.

There are several reasons to invest in long (a.k.a. long form) content, which I define as written work with more than 1,200 words. Writing long pieces, however, is not for everyone. At a minimum, it requires vision, reader understanding and organizational skills.

The Case for Long Content

Google sees long form content as having greater quality and uniqueness – and rewards it accordingly. More importantly,

Writing long content requires vision, organization and focus.

longer content provides a deeper look into topics. Thanks to years of internet content publishing and supersaturation of similar text, customers have become more sophisticated. They want greater insight that comes from more detail, explanation, examples and other elements that define meaningful content.

Producing longer content attracts readers and boosts search engine optimization (SEO). It also demonstrates subject matter expertise and thought leadership. While communications and marketing professionals know this, they are often too overwhelmed to ensure their content is truly unique. Long content also presents greater opportunities to reuse material for tweets and blogs or enhance it for short e-books.

Developing comprehensive website content requires a long content approach to ensure organization, avoid omissions and maintain focus. Building website maps and structure requires the same big picture thinking and focus as organizing reports or feature articles. When writing or re-writing websites, I approach a site as a large and flexible editorial package. The combination of content and visuals should support a website's main purpose and message.

It Ain't Easy

Anyone who has tried writing long form content quickly realizes that it is not easy. Besides requiring skills I mentioned already, there are also characteristics of writers who can produce long copy that cannot be taught.

The art of writing long content requires an almost unquenchable natural curiosity, deep thinking and the ability to simultaneously focus on the big picture while focusing on micro details. Writers of long form content also possess the necessary patience and perseverance to reach completion. They are also quick studies who can overcome deep learning curves.

Writers who possess the skill, natural ability and experience to produce long form pieces are rare. There are several reasons, but I see two primary explanations.

To my knowledge, being able to write long pieces for business purposes has never been required for degrees in business, marketing, journalism or communications. Due to continual changes in communications technology and techniques, marketing and communications professionals find themselves struggling to stay current. Since writing long content requires practice, they have little time to develop this valuable and essential skill.

Tips for Writing Long Content

After publishing hundreds of feature articles and other forms of long content, I have developed practical techniques for working through the process. Here are some:

- Create an outline for long content; always being flexible to new ideas, directives and information can redefine the original path.
- To keep track of different sources while combining their information for text, electronically color-code each source.
- After producing a cohesive work, convert the colorful text to black to focus on the actual words without distraction. Print the text and review it to ensure organization and flow. Put on "the critic" hat. Make sure the text is truly informative, the writing is clear and the organization is logical. Be relentless and remove anything unnecessary.
- Upon making necessary revisions, print out a fact-checking draft. I use different colors of erasable pens, pencils or markers for each source. When the process is complete, I have the option to erase distractions before making electronic corrections.
- When possible, abandon content for at least a day or two. This way, the next review is more objective. The longer the wait, the greater the objectivity.
- Before submission, print out the written work once again. Read the material backward, starting with the last sentence of the piece and working to the first. This is the best way to find potential comma faults, misspellings and other small details easy to miss on screen.

If you decide to hire a writer for long content projects, [review work samples](). During the interview, pay close attention to what the writer asks about a project. Long content writers do not think in essays, but editorial packages. That is, they see the big picture and anticipate ways to make long content more easily digestible through sidebars, infographics and other graphic elements. (For more advice on hiring freelance writers, click [here]().)

A Final Thought

In the next few years, it will become more commonplace for companies to use predictive modeling and artificial intelligence to produce content. It may also work for tweets, news releases and even brief blogs.

This is no immediate threat to creators of long form articles. While people and machines may learn some skills necessary for writing long content, there are natural characteristics that cannot be taught.

Question: How do you tackle writing long content? Let me know in the comments section below.