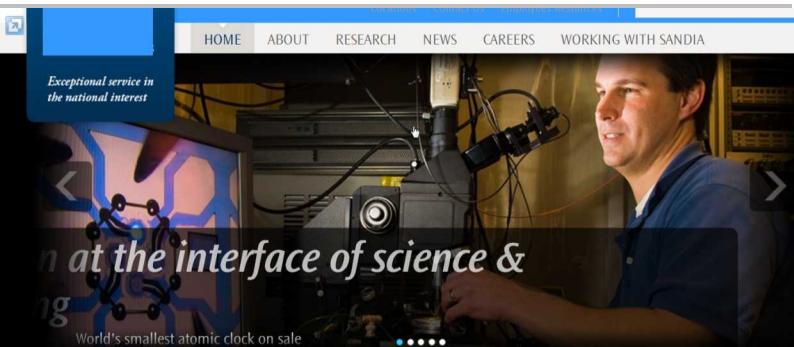


Exceptional service in the national interest



Writing for Web Readers

Back to the Basics

Jennifer Awe, Public Relations



Sandia National Laboratories is a multi-program laboratory managed and operated by Sandia Corporation, a wholly owned subsidiary of Lockheed Martin Corporation, for the U.S. Department of Energy's National Nuclear Security Administration under contract DE-AC04-94AL85000.

Write for your audience

- Advertising copy differs greatly from news releases or print, which differ greatly from web
- Likewise, readers read different media in different ways



Tweets

 The Associated Press @AP	36s
Illinois officials: Storms killed 6 people - not 10 - in the southern Illinois town of Harrisburg: apne.ws/xnbIRW -EF	
 BU Engineering @BUCollegeofENG	59m
Today @ 3p, 3 Cummings Street, Room 595 - @BU_MSE Colloquium w/ Robert Ecke of @LosAlamosNatLab! #BU #engineering ow.ly/9d04q	
Retweeted by LosAlamosNationalLab	
 SENN news	3m
Santa Fe New Mexican @thenewmexican New Blog Post: Rodefer Challenging Sapien - Former state Rep. Ben Rodefer will challenge state Sen. John Sapien of C... ow.ly/1hlrqX	
 Physics Today @PhysicsToday	3m
Job Posting: Neutron Scattering Instrument Scientist – Career Development Program Oak Ridge National L... bit.ly/xbwbXI #PTJOBS	

Know your audience

- They skim — they don't read
 - 79% of users scan instead of reading each word
- They want information quickly
- Reading a computer screen is 25% slower than reading paper
- Clicking hyperlinks is the #1 activity for users

“F” format

- Users scan **horizontally** across the top first
- Then, users scan a **second horizontal line** covering a shorter area
- Users scan the left side in a **vertical movement**



Heatmaps from user eyetracking studies of three websites. The areas where users looked the most are colored red; the yellow areas indicate fewer views, followed by the least-viewed blue areas. Gray areas didn't attract any fixations (useit.com).

Why is this important?

- Key information on top
 - Top of story, front of headline (frontload)

*Researchers near final test phase for **HIV vaccine***

vs.

***HIV vaccine** in final stages*

- Make it scannable:
 - Bulleted lists
 - **Bold**, *italicized* words
 - Links
 - Sidebars
 - Subheads and short paragraphs

Why is this important?

- Eliminate most adjectives, most fluff
- Reduce word count from print
 - By about 50%
- Readability
 - SMOG

First things first - headlines



Headlines

- Draw the reader in
- Invest a lot of time here
 - Write it before, during, and after your story – tweak as you go
- If it's not strong, the content won't matter
- Think searchability (frontload, F format)
 - Key words, key words, key words
 - Think of how you use the web



How?

- Short
 - *<7 words*
- Informative
 - *tell your readers what they need to know*
 - *simple subject, simple predicate*
 - *facts, stats* – 85% of cigarette smoke is invisible
- Understandable
 - *easy to understand without the article below*

Examples:

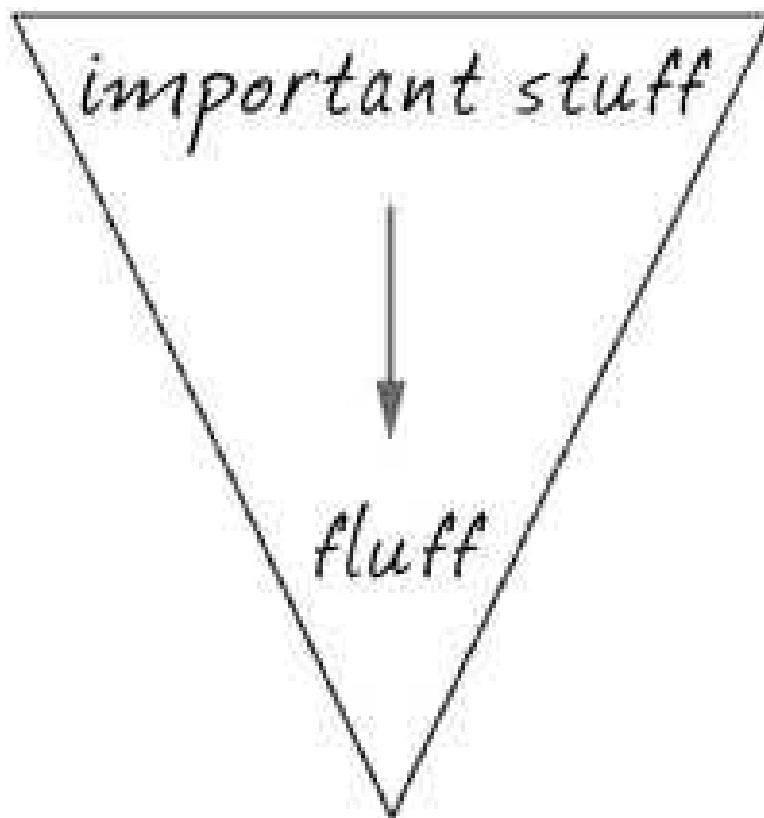
- Italy Buries Quake Victims
- Is Microsoft dying? CNNMoney
- Toxic Metals Tied to Work in Prisons
- Feds: Elderly face financial abuse
- Brain Eating Amoeba Kills Three

Next...telling the story



The story

- Inverted pyramid to the extreme



The story

- Strong lead – who, what, where, when
- Emotion “sells” the story
 - Why should I care?
 - How does it affect me or my family?
- Eliminate most adjectives, most fluff – get to the point

How concise is too concise?

- Study posted an original document and a revision cut by 54%
(Morkes and Nielsen)
- Users preferred the **shorter** version and even thought it was *more* complete than the original
- "How complete is the site's treatment of the topic?", the rewritten version scored 7 out of 10, compared with 6 for the original

**Concise writing is *not*
inconsistent with
comprehensive writing**

Step outside...

Think like your audience.

- How would *they* search the page?
- What would “capabilities” or “assets” mean to them?
- Ask for help from someone *outside* your area

References

- www.useit.com
- Plain Writing Act guidance:

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/memoranda/2011/m11-15.pdf>

- www.alistapart.com
- www.websitetips.com

Thank you

- Questions?
- Discussion