

21 Ways to Create Great Online Content

February 2008

By Jennifer Melo, Web Editor, Homemakers.com

1. **Assign it** -- web exclusive content consistently outperforms book excerpts and repurposed pieces.
2. Check your **stats** -- Learn which topics perform best, attack that topic from different angles, and then refer to item #1 in this list: Assign it!
3. **Repurpose** it -- build on the reputation of your brand; translate magazine articles for online readers in ways that take advantage of the strengths of online media. Break through the limitations of the printed page: **Hyperlink** text to relevant web articles, create **audio** or **video** concepts that enhance the print article.
4. Use **search engine** data -- Google Adwords and tools like it reveal what users are searching for. Use this information to create new articles, edit and revive old articles.
5. Create **top 10** lists. Readers love 'em, they're easy to pull together, they force you to retain your focus.
6. Book **excerpts** -- look for web-friendly sources. A how-to item followed by a list is ideal.
7. Encourage **user-generated** copy and control -- Forums, reader feedback and contests offer great ways to collect editorial input from readers. Give readers opportunities to contribute to your brand. Add social bookmarking options to allow readers to share your content and attract more readers.
8. Promote your **experts** -- The knowledge and experience of magazine staff contributes to terrific editorial, enhances the connection between online and print brands.
9. Create an article **series** -- three articles with distinct themes, linking to one another, are better than one long article that attempts to impart too many messages.
10. Choose **service** articles over essays.
11. Go for **quantity** when you can. Demand for content is constant. More content = more traffic.
12. Don't neglect **quality**. It's what retains readership, secures credibility and defines your brand.
13. Consider your **magazine's strengths**. Accept your limitations. E.g., The magazine's Test Kitchen recipes are a core strength that I wouldn't attempt to replicate on an online budget. Solution: Reprint the mag recipes. Don't reinvent the wheel.
14. **Repackage** archived content. 25 chocolate recipes are better than three.
15. Monitor your **competitors**. Their current successes can inspire your future successes. Subscribe to their newsletters and/or RSS feeds.
16. Respond to **timely** topics. Careful lineup planning enables you to respond to timely topics, offering readers exactly what they want, when they want it. Timely topics announce that your content is relevant/useful.
17. Work with **PR contacts** -- They're great sources for trends, experts and can supply cool contest prizes.
18. Respect reader **feedback** -- yes, even when those readers are being mean. They reveal your content needs/weaknesses. Learn from your reader feedback.
19. Make it **readable**. Bold keywords, add lots of subheads, give hyperlinks a consistent style, use bulleted lists. The quality of your editorial can be great but no one will read it if your copy is an eyesore.
20. Give it an explicit **title**. Favour search-engine friendly, clear, specific titles over ambiguous ones. You may have the most clever title in the entire WWW, but search engines -- and users -- won't find that article if the title is not clear.
21. **Remember your readers**. There are several competing forces to balance: magazine brand, search engines, business demands, etc., but as a web editor, you're ultimately responsible for the reader experience and establishing or developing your online property. Protect your readers' interests.

Recommended resources:

www.cyberjournalist.net

Type "online writing" into their search tool and you'll find hundreds of relevant results.

www.poynter.org

Click on the Online category in the left-hand nav./sidebar. Get handy tips sheets, new trends in online media and more.

www.useit.com

Help readers easily find and use your content with tips from usability expert Jakob Nielsen. Check out his columns, reports, etc.

www.copyblogger.com

"Copywriting tips for online marketing success."

Find lots of solid advice to help you write engaging and effective online copy.