Marketing Text on XYZ.com

A HOT Evaluation by YourNameGoesHere

Purpose

To determine the extent to which your site's marketing materials work on the Web.

The tactics for creating effective marketing materials appear here as a set of guidelines based on research and actual experience, documented in books, journal articles, and online styleguides. (References appear at the end of the evaluation instrument). Each guideline, then, provides a method for a writer to follow, or a **heuristic**.

In this evaluation we test the text against these guidelines. You are, then, performing a **heuristic evaluation**.

Method

Here's how to perform a Heuristic Online Text (HOT) evaluation.

1. Save this file with a name that includes

- ❑ The site you are analyzing
- ❑ The aspect you are evaluating (marketing material, in this case)
- ❑ Initials
- ❑ A period
- ❑ A suffix indicating the file type (doc for Word files, htm for HTML files)

Examples: ibmmenusjp.doc, yahoomenusds.htm

2. Go to your site, and locate 5 different pages with marketing information.

Look for pages that praise the company itself, or its products and services.

3. Copy the marketing text from each page and paste it into this document.

4. Copy the URL for that page, then paste that into this file, in the line right after the marketing text.

The URL is the address of the home page.

5. Type today's date on the next line, to show when you collected the marketing text.

6. Apply the HOT Evaluation to the materials you have collected, filling out the evaluation form.

If a strategy or tactic seems irrelevant, omit it from your evaluation. Note that this will change the total possible points.

At the end, total up the points you have issued, draw conclusions, and make recommendations.

Evaluation

The marketing material begins with customers, not products.

Tests

The site organizes marketing information around the customer's tasks or activities.

YES=1, NO=0.

In general, the site describes customer experiences first, bringing in the product afterward.

YES=1, NO=0.

The site makes an attempt to define niche audiences, and addresses them directly, or describes them explicitly.

YES=1, NO=0.

The marketing material sometimes starts with a statement of a common problem faced by their customers, or a need, or desire they share, before showing how the company's products or services solve the problem, satisfy the need, or fulfill the desire.

YES=1, NO=0.

The site includes stories about real customers using their products or services (case studies or success stories).

YES=1, NO=0.

The site includes quotes from named customers.

YES=1, NO=0.

Analysis

If the site starts its pitch with the customer, how exactly does it do that? If the site seems to ignore the customer as a subject, what does the marketing material focus on, instead?

Conclusion

How would you sum up the degree to which the marketing text seems to center around the customer?

The marketing text avoids fluff.

Tests

The pitch gets at the emotional heart of the issue.

YES=1, NO=0.

The marketing material avoids strings of pat phrases intended to shorthand a series of benefits (world-class enterprise-wide solutions bundle).

YES=1, NO=0.

The marketing text is built, mostly, out of nouns and verbs, keeping adverbs and adjectives to a minimum.

YES=1, NO=0.

The mission statement has been banned from the home page, demoted to some minor sub-section, or completely deleted.

YES=1, NO=0.

Analysis

In what ways, exactly, does the site indulge in fluff? If the site is fluff-free, how does the site manage that, concretely?

Conclusion

How would you sum up the degree to which the marketing text seems straight-forward, and fluff-free?

The marketing text sounds honest, and personal.

Tests

The marketing writers sound like real people.

YES=1, NO=0.

The marketing writers seem earnest, because they are not too polished, they ramble at times, they have to repeat their main point.

YES=1, NO=0.

The marketing writers mention details from their own lives.

YES=1, NO=0.

The marketing people have faces. (Photos of the people speaking to us).

YES=1, NO=0.

The tone is informative, realistic, and enthusiastic, so that I feel as if you are honestly excited by your product.

YES=1, NO=0.

The writers admit problems or drawbacks matter-of-factly, offering workarounds as kludges, not fantastic benefits.

YES=1, NO=0.

The writers make promises that their companies can realistically expect to keep.

Analysis

How personal does it get? How honest? If the site is resolutely corporate, what is the overall tone? Quote specific phrases, to show what makes you react in this way.

Conclusion

How would you sum up the tone of the marketing materials?

The marketing material is persuasive.

Tests

I can identify a unique selling proposition for the company, or individual products and services.

YES=1, NO=0.

Product information includes photos, screenshots, or diagrams of the product. I can see what I will get.

YES=1, NO=0.

Product information relates concrete benefits to each feature mentioned. This is not just a list of features. I can see how each feature would do me good.

YES=1, NO=0.

When the product is new, unfamiliar, or complicated, the site shows how it works, with animation, a tutorial, or a series of diagrams.

YES=1, NO=0.

The site offers a complete set of specifications in a data sheet for each product.

YES=1, NO=0.

To convince us, the site offers direct links to reviews (rather than just snagging a quote out of context).

YES=1, NO=0.

The site offers quotes from happy customers—ideally, with their names and addresses.

YES=1, NO=0.

The site offers stories of their successes, or case studies.

YES=1, NO=0.

The site includes a direct comparison with the competition, pointing out advantages.

YES=1, NO=0.

To answer common objections, the material addresses questions, or suspicions explicitly, rather than trying to get past the objection by exaggeration or implication.

YES=1, NO=0.

To give managers more context, and make the extended argument for the product, the site offers white papers, web conferences, or slide presentations.

YES=1, NO=0.

Marketing material mentions or links to customer assistance, documentation, bug databases, and other support materials, without embarrassment. The marketing people seem to go for complete disclosure.

YES=1, NO=0.

Analysis

How persuasive is the material? Quote specific phrases, to show what makes you react in this way.

Conclusion

How well would this material persuade target audiences?

The marketing pages encourage me to take the next step.

Tests

The marketing material makes clear what action I should take next.

YES=1, NO=0.

They make it easy to buy.

YES=1, NO=0.

They give me an incentive to buy right away.

YES=1, NO=0.

If I am still hesitating, I see that the site offers something for free: a demo copy, a white paper, a tool, to keep me engaged.

YES=1, NO=0.

Analysis

How clear is the invitation to action? How likely is it that someone in the target audience will make the purchase?

Conclusion

How well does this material close the sale?

References:

See: Hansell (2001), Henning (2000a, 2000b, 2001a), Knowledge Capital Group (2001), Locke (2001), Price and Price (1999), Sawhney (2001), Sawhney and Parikh (2000), Sawhney and Zabin (2001), Usborne (2001a, 2001b, 2001c) in the bibliography at http://www.webwritingthatworks.com/HTres2cbiblio.pdf.pdf .

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Total Score

Assigning a grade to a set of texts is always a bit arbitrary. But counting up the points for these sample texts, we reach this diagnosis:

Total Points:

Total Possible:

Percentage:

Interpretation

90-100%: Excellent marketing.

75-89%: Pretty persuasive.

60-74%: Could use some rewrites.

45-59%: A mess.

25-44%: Sure to repel some visitors.

0-24: Guaranteed to make visitors reach for the Back button.

Overall Conclusions

In a few paragraphs, summarize your most important observations—both positive and negative.

Major Recommendations

List the top three problems with the marketing material, and in a sentence or two, summarize what you would recommend as solutions.