

Erasure: One Step to Better Copy

By Heather Reimer

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Heather Reimer
heather@thewritecontent.com

The Write Content <http://thewritecontent.com>

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[">mailto:heather@thewritecontent.com](mailto:heather@thewritecontent.com)

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The Roman poet Horace said, "You must often make erasures if you mean to write what is worthy of being read a second time." Two thousand years later, those words still hold true.

If you're responsible for the content of a website or newsletter, then erasures - editing - can make your words worthy of being read a FIRST time. Erasures are one thing you can do (or rather undo) to raise your content and your promotional materials above the mediocre writing that dominates the net.

A composer once observed that sublime music is determined as much by the rests as by the notes themselves. And so good copy can be made better by the words you don't see on the page.

QUANTITY VS. QUALITY WORDS

I'm sure you've come across sites and publications that were so full of padding, you wondered if the point would ever materialize out of the fog of verbiage. A lot of content writers substitute long copy for compelling copy, quantity for quality.

For example, one webmaster wrote a 3000-word home page stuffed with incredibly repetitive keywords and phrases to please the search engines. He may have concocted some yummy spider food but I'm sure his would-be customers never bit off more than the first 500 or so words. The missing ingredient? Erasure.

The article you're reading originally opened with a lovely

little anecdote that became an early victim of erasure because it wasn't focused tightly enough on the subject at hand. It wasn't easy to make that sacrifice, believe me.

SLASH AND BURN

Erasure is never easy. It requires you to be brutally honest with yourself and your writing style. It requires slash and burn techniques that may reduce your epic forest to a few lonely (but pertinent) pines waving in the breeze.

If you don't have the stomach to murder your darlings, you may want to consider a professional "eraser". Blockbuster authors like Stephen King, John Grisham and Tom Clancy wouldn't be where they are today without editors who, you'll notice, are always praised profusely in the forewords of their books.

Not everyone was cut out to be a best-selling writer. But we can all take advantage of erasure to make our online copy easier to read, more persuasive and ultimately worth reading... maybe even a second time.

(If you'd like to learn more about editing your own content, read the article Navel Gazing: How to Edit Yourself at: <http://www.thewritecontent.com/editself.html>)

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