October

at The Goodman Center

Strategic Communications:
Cutting through the Clutter

October 6, 7, 11–12pm PST

There are four potential points of connection between you and your target audience. When you know all four and design your communications around them, every minute and dollar you invest will have a better chance of paying off. Fail to connect on even one point, however, and you give your audience an opportunity to walk away. And in this age of information overload, most audiences are happy to do just that.

In this two-hour online class (conducted over two days), we will cover:

- The basics of framing
- Message creation and delivery
- Classic case studies from the public-interest sector
- A template for campaign design

Design:
Deciding on Design

October 22, 27, 29, 11–12pm PST

Design has a nearly incalculable impact on your message. It can make your website more compelling, your direct mail more readable, your PowerPoint more memorable, your advertising more persuasive. Even if you are not directly responsible for buying design, you probably have to evaluate and approve designed materials before your audience sees them.

This three-hour online class (conducted over three days) is a not-too-deep dive into graphic design, providing just enough information to help you look more carefully and decide more wisely before approving anything that visually represents your organization.

To learn more and register online, visit **thegoodmancenter.com**

the goodman center
where do-gooders learn to do better

A partnership of Lipman Hearne and Andy Goodman

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free-range thinking

Writing for Non-Readers

Most visitors to your website want information, and they want it fast. So how can you present a more user-friendly site? Start by *Letting Go of the Words.*

In his article "Lazy Eyes: How We Read Online," *Slate* senior editor Michael Agger writes, "In earlier days, when switching between sites was time-consuming, we tended to stay in one place and dig. Now we assess a site quickly, looking for an 'information scent.' We move on if there doesn't seem to be any food around." Jakob Nielsen, who studies how people use the web, has quantified this phenomenon. Of those he observed visiting websites, 79% quickly scanned the pages they saw. Only 16% actually read word by word.
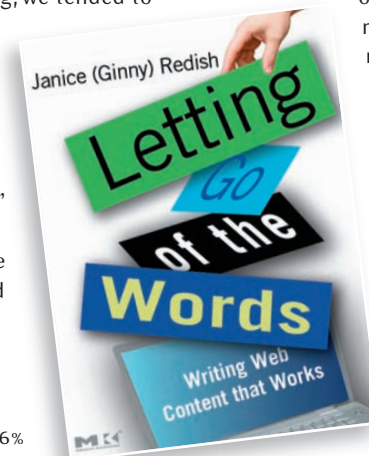
Now take another look at your site, starting with the home page. Have you erected walls of words that visitors must climb over (if they haven't already bolted) to continue their search? Does your text address the questions they bring to your site, or is it still focused on your organization, mission and accomplishments? Are you marketing to visitors before giving them anything of value?

Since 1992, Ginny Redish has helped businesses, nonprofits and government agencies avoid these common mistakes. Clients who have benefited from her advice include AARP, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Marriott and the National Cancer Institute. Her newest book, *Letting Go of the Words: Writing Web Content That Works,* now brings that same expert advice to you.

▶ **Goodman: What motivated you to write this book?**

Redish: When Steve Krug came out with *Don't Make Me Think,* I said I wanted to write volume two and focus it on web content. It's not enough to have a website with good search and navigation. What happens when people select a page from the search results? What happens when they need to do the task they came to do? I wanted to write a book that helps organizations create great web content that meets their site visitors' needs.

The title may not convey the breadth of your book. It's about a lot more than just the words, isn't it?

I'm glad to hear you say that. I just led a workshop based on the book, and we only spent about a third of the time on writing. First, you have to think about how people use websites, about the conversations your site visitors want to start with your website. And then you can begin designing the website that helps them conduct those conversations. So yes, there is much more to it than just the words.

What are the most common mistakes that drive people away from web sites?

The top one is probably dense text — walls of words. They send the message "This is going to be really hard for you to deal with." The second is the wrong information at the wrong time. Some websites are so internally focused, they want to tell you all about the organization rather than actually help users. And the third would be marketing to site visitors when they're not ready for it. People come to your website because

Ginny Redish

they have a need. If you confront them with marketing messages *before* they've met their need, you're just annoying them. After you've satisfied their need, then you have what I call a "marketing moment."

Why do you think organizations make these mistakes?

With the "wall of words" problem, it's because that's the way they're used to writing. And that's why the book has the title it does: people have trouble letting go of the words. Internal focus happens because the user isn't at the table when the site is being built. The attitude tends to be, "I have this content, and I'm going to put it online." The marketing-too-soon problem happens because the website is often developed in the marketing department.

Do nonprofits and government agencies make the same mistakes as your commercial clients?

Yes, and this book is as much, if not more, for good causes as for the e-commerce folks. Good causes are often selling themselves more than products, so they feel they have a lot to say. But they have to learn to say it without using so many words. They have to think more about the people they are serving. They have to think about the questions their site visitors come to the site to ask. I work a great deal with government agencies, and that's something we work on with their websites.

How can readers get a copy of your book?

They can get it online from Amazon.com or directly from the publisher (*www.mkp.com* or *www.elsevier.com*).

They can also download chapters 1 and 5 from my website, *www.redish.net/writingfortheweb.*

Are there other books on this subject you can recommend?

I do consider this book a companion to *Don't Make Me Think.* And in October, Caroline Jarrett and Gerry Gaffney's new book, *Forms that Work: Designing Web Forms for Usability* will be available on Amazon.com.

And if an organization wants to work with you directly?

Please have them contact me at *ginny@redish.net.*

Assuming, of course, that anybody actually reads this.

Focusing Your Essential Messages

Whatever your essential message is, put it first. Many web users read only a few words of a page – or of a paragraph – before deciding if it is going to be relevant and easy for them to get through. If they think it might not be, they move on. They may jump down the page to a heading or a bulleted list or to very briefly try another paragraph. And that may be all the time and attention that they'll give to a page.

Journalists and technical writers know that many readers skim the headlines and first paragraphs of articles. That's one reason they write in "inverted pyramid" style – with the main point first.

For many web content writers, using inverted pyramid style requires a major shift in thinking and writing. For school essays and reports, you may have been taught to write in narrative style, telling a whole story in chronological order and building up to the main point at the end – the conclusion. That's not a good style for the workplace or the web. Busy web users don't have time for that when they are trying to find information. They want the conclusion first.

Excerpted from *Letting Go of the Words*