

7 ways BtoB content can change everything

You don't need, all the time, to be touchy-feely, or a jokester, or lovey-dovey, or dumb things down, or shrug and say you're not sure. But your written words for a professional audience can sometimes, somewhere, do all those things and bring your words and your authority to life for readers.

By Brendan Howard

Books were made for them. Magazines are full of them and every website on earth is a black hole that sucks them up faster than any of us can write them.

Words. Words to help. Words to inform. Words to entertain.

While those of us in the BtoB (business-to-business) press aren't writing the next great American novel, we do need and use words all the time. Whether you're writing ads, marketing brochures, educational materials or news stories for a busy business audience, you need to sometimes consider the big picture: are you using words in every way you can? If not . . . why not?

Remember: every piece of written material cannot and should not do all these things. But your entire menu of written content, over a month and over a year, could touch, in big ways or small ways, on these important approaches.

Here, I break down the two basic and necessary ways, four more advanced ways and two big-picture ways to serve readers. Prove yourself to folks by making yourself useful. Then show you know how to finesse words and visuals efficiently, creatively and with intelligence. Then rise above the day-to-day troubles to help readers grapple with the big picture of their professional world and personal place in it.

Do this every day: 2 ways BtoB content can serve readers

Prove you get your readers. People are bombarded with words all the time. Why should they read your specialized content over all that high-quality stuff in mainstream media? One way to get through the mess is to show you have a special understanding of who they are and what they're going through, that you "get" them. This isn't for you to decide; this is for them to reflect back to you with comments, increased website traffic and appreciative smiles and nods. You need to know who they are, what their work life is like, and what they believe about themselves, their peers and their own clients. Then you need to include those special words, experiences and ideas in your words. *Show* them you understand – don't *tell* them.

Help readers work smarter and earn more. Every reader is not thinking about making more money, cutting down on expenses, and managing finances better all the time. But they should, sometimes, because even if money doesn't seem like the issue, it might be. People squeeze out their dreams because expenses are too high or revenue is too low, so money is a deeply emotional, important thing for people to think about, even a little bit. Mix your money talk in with understanding, emotion, humor and hope, and you can draw even money-averse readers to think about dollars.

Time is the other resource readers wrestle with. Can you truthfully promise that your words can earn back some minutes, hours or days for people? Can you provide workarounds and paths through roadblocks in processes they use each day? Then you've got gold sitting around. Time to write it down.

Grow into this: 4 ways BtoB content can wow readers

Covered the essential three basics? You might be ready for these.

Surf bigger waves. When big trends in the world and in professions are too big to fix or change at the individual business level, bosses and employees can get overwhelmed fast. Do the words you share show you understand which big waves are crashing through your readers' worlds right now? If you don't have the answers, help readers feel better about being in a time of uncertainty. If you have answers, share them humbly and remember because you like a particular solution, or because certain advice has worked for you, or because your company sells a particular product doesn't mean that your fix is the right one.

Get readers talking. Give your audience members something to talk about, give them questions to answer back to you to share later with them, or give them an online forum. No matter what you do, part of inspiring and educating can be dialogue—conversations between and among people—not just shouting from your castle's ramparts.

Keep it simple. At the same time your written content can help readers manage the uncertainty and complexity of bigger waves, some of your other content should always try to find the small things to change, the easy paths to solutions and the little tweaks that a busy, stressed professional could implement right now to fix something. It's a dance: don't oversimplify problems and solutions, but also don't overcomplicate them. Sometimes folks need to read your 10,000-word white paper, but are you positive you couldn't distill all that knowledge into a few actionable ideas and tips? Don't fall in love with the forest of the big picture and miss all the little flowers you can show off to readers.

Have fun. Readers have the whole world of diversions to escape from their professional lives, but there's a place for escapism and entertainment inside the workaday world. Joke, have fun and be playful in how you use words and share your message – even if normally your regular content is serious. If readers find out you give enjoyment and the word equivalent of free hugs, not just advice to implement or education to stuff in their brains, won't they be more likely to read it?

Ascend here: 2 ways BtoB content can change readers' worlds

What are you doing, and why? These content goals grow beyond utilitarian tips and immediate needs.

Remind them they deserve to love and be loved. People's jobs and lives can be hard. Your words should love on your audience and remind them to love on those around them. This doesn't mean you need to write corny Hallmark movie, shmaltzy crap. It means you should put some love and some advice to create love, among your professional, informative words. And, please, please, feel it. So many faceless corporations tell us they care about us, from brands to human beings. Don't be a brand in these moments. Be you. Find the folks in your company who feel authentic love for the audience and ask them to help you figure out what words would touch hearts, not to boost your traffic or sell your product, but to be human and kind.

Help readers change themselves and the world. Let's touch on this way, way overused word. Some of your content won't be just to inspire, entertain or educate. You want to be a changemaker. You want to be a change agent. Whatever you call it, you want your content to get people to change – change how they do things, change how they see things, change the world. Start small, with a single, basic piece of actionable advice. The journey of a thousand miles, says Lao Tzu, begins with a single step.

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