asterisk *

Insights and smart practices from your content team

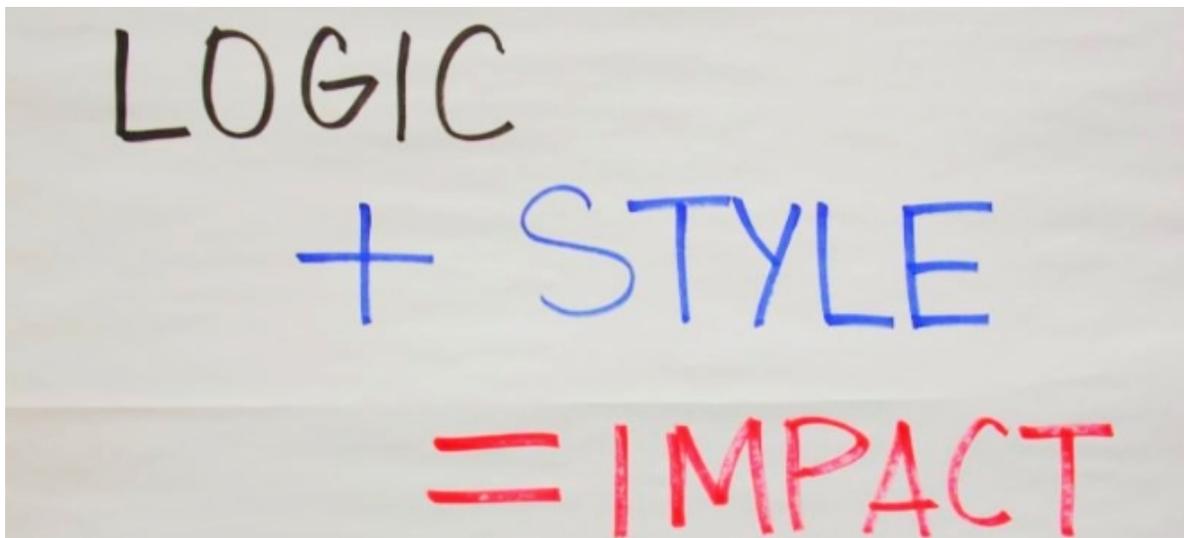**Issue No. 4**   **October 2014**

In this issue of *asterisk**, we explore the value of clear logic, the history of the useful ampersand, and the appeal of the perennial ghost story.

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feature*

THE MATH OF WRITING: WHY LOGIC MATTERS

Sound logic has always been fundamental to good writing: it's what carries readers to the point of an argument. With the volume of information people consume today, getting to that point quickly and clearly is crucial. In marketing communications, there's no time for drifting along a river of thought toward some eventual conclusion. Logic in the content age needs to be as direct and explicit as the copy itself.

Keys to strong logic in writing

Think first
Logic gives structure to the flow of ideas in writing. The smoother the flow, the greater the impact. Good flow requires deliberate engineering* -- mapping out the ideas and how they connect before committing words to paper. Remember Grade 10, when the teacher made everyone underline their thesis statements before writing essays on *Animal Farm* and *Brave New World*? It's basically the same principle at work.

Stick to the point
In well engineered writing, every point reinforces the previous and sets up the next. Those connections forge the logic of the piece. A good way to keep the connections clear is to make sure the article, web page, case study, etc., isn't overloaded with points: when there are too many, it's harder for any one or two to stand out, and readers could come away unsure of what they're supposed to think.

Substantiate your case
The best way to reinforce the logic of an argument is by substantiating it with facts. These days, readers tend to ignore hyperbolic declarations like "It's the greatest solution ever!" Being clear about the thesis and structure of the argument makes it easy to choose the best, most relevant facts to make the case.

Express it artfully
Even the best constructed argument isn't going to persuade readers on its own: the writing needs to engage them and hold their attention from start to finish. Once you've 'done the math' -- mapping out a clear, logical structure -- the task of writing begins, giving the thoughts tone and style.

*Apologies to all our engineer friends for taking artistic licence with their terminology.

Read more of our thoughts on logic and impact [here](#).

punc'd*

HOW THE AMPERSAND MADE THE ALPHABET SHORTER

Twenty-six letters. That's all Hemingway used to write his masterworks, Poe to invent the detective story, and Shakespeare to compose his brilliant tragedies and comedies.

Well, Shakespeare actually may have had a few extra letters to play with. Like the ampersand -- written as "&" and once the 27th letter of the alphabet.

The symbol always meant "and" and that's how it was pronounced. When reciting the alphabet, children were taught to say "x, y, z and, per se, and." ("Per se" meaning "by itself".)

Eventually, "and, per se, and" became "ampersand" and the letter was dropped from the alphabet.

That's not the only extra letter once available to English writers. "Ash," a combination of the letters "a" and "e" was once a letter, and is still part of some alphabets, like Danish and Faroese. And "thorn," representing the "th" and resembling a "P" at half mast, left English around the 14th century, but still survives in Iceland.

pop*

BOO! THE APPEAL OF SCARY STORIES

In the history of storytelling, certain types of stories reoccur: tales of rising to power and falling from grace, or of starcrossed lovers fighting against fate to be together. In the corporate world, stories of innovation, expansion and transformation are constantly being spun.

At this time of year, another branch of storytelling gets its annual dust-off: the spooky story. There are the 'monsters of the night' variety -- about vampires, werewolves and other abominations. There are stories of demonic possession -- your *Exorcists* and *Omens*. There's the zombie plague of zombie plagues (seriously, that subgenre will not die). And

there are ghost stories, the staple of campfires for as long as there have been campfires.

No matter how they're reinvented, these stories stay largely the same year after year, which suggests they may serve some other purpose than pure storytelling. Writers like Stephen King say it's because they have a cathartic effect, giving us a safe outlet to confront our fears of the unknown. Whatever the case, their perennial popularity shows no sign of disappearing.

What's your favourite spooky story? Tweet @ascribeinc #spookystories.

content matters*

iMinds anniversary conference

Belgium's digital research agency, iMinds, celebrated 10 years of fostering innovation this October with a daylong conference in Brussels attended by more than 1,400 researchers, entrepreneurs and thought leaders. Ascribe has been working with iMinds over the course of the year to develop a series of vision papers and supporting case studies on key research areas including operational optimization, 3D visualization and the Internet of Things -- some of which were launched at the conference, and others to be published in the months to come. [Dale Morris](#) and [Andrew Kirkwood](#) attended the conference on Oct-ober 23rd to mark the launch of the papers. Learn more about iMinds and the conference at www.iminds.be/en.

shout-out*

Ascribe's growing team

The Ascribe team has grown again. This past September, we welcomed Sarah Thuswaldner to the writing team and Caitlin Teed as Client Service Administrator and Project Coordinator. Both talented graduates of Carleton University's esteemed Journalism program, these new team players deepen our capacity to deliver high-calibre writing and excellence in client service. You can read Sarah and Caitlin's bios at ascribeinc.ca/about.

practice point*

SHOWING AND HIDING TRACKED CHANGES IN MS WORD

Whether you're writing or reviewing documents, it pays to know your way around the Track Changes function of Word -- especially when you receive a file that's supposed to contain tracked changes and they're not showing up when you open it. Often this is because the file is set to a different view option than you need.

Here's how to check:

1. Click the 'Review' tab

2. Go to the dropdown under the label 'Tracking'
3. Make sure the file is set to 'Final Showing Markup' -- that will display all tracked changes and comments

The second dropdown, 'Show Markup,' lets you further fine-tune how you view tracked changes by isolating the markups of a particular author or by showing only specific types of markups, such as comments or deletions.

storytelling*

MOMENTS IN STORYTELLING

127,000 BC
The earliest undisputed intentional human burial provides a formal way of concluding the 'story' of a life.

1812
The Brothers Grimm collect and publish German folk tales, giving Walt Disney and his successors endless source material for animated movies, merchandise and theme-park rides.

2014
Twenty-five years after it went off the air, David Lynch and Mark Frost announce they will be revisiting the town of Twin Peaks in a new series on the U.S. network Showtime with the cryptic tweet, "That gum you like is going to come back in style!"

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