asterisk *

Insights and smart practices from your content team

THE KEYS TO CREATING QUALITY CONTENT

In our previous issue of *asterisk**, we looked at why quality matters when it comes to marketing content. (Hint: it can have a big impact on brand perception and buying choices.) The next obvious question is, "So how do you make quality content?"

While the exact steps will vary depending on the type of content, there are a few essentials that can be factored into any quality-focused content development process:

Strategy
Always be clear how any piece of content supports your business goals. What is it reinforcing, to whom, and why is that important? With that ultimate target in mind, it's easier and usually faster to make on-the-fly decisions about execution along the way. If you're developing a content program or campaign, work out how one piece builds on what's come before and prepares the reader for what will follow.

Value
Identify where you can add value for your readers by closing a knowledge gap or addressing an information need. If it's not clear from your internal understanding where those opportunities lie, a quick Google search

can reveal spaces for thought leadership in your market.

Process
Break content development down into manageable steps and stages with "gates" between them. Once a stage is completed and signed off internally, if done thoughtfully and with diligence, there should be no need to go back to it. You can advance toward the next milestone with the confidence that you're building quality in at each increment.

Realism
Disciplined marcom teams generate high volumes of content in short timeframes by keeping things practical. If you have a small number of internal gatekeepers who have to approve all the materials for a campaign, keep the campaign focused or stage out the reviews to avoid time-pressured bottlenecks. Or if subject-matter expert time is hard to come by, don't plan optimistically and hope they'll be free. Allow for a longer research window, be clear up front about why you're asking for their time and give them questions in advance so they can prepare.

Applying these principles boosts the odds of content development success — and provides the checks and balances needed to maintain quality along the way.

If you'd like to talk further about how to generate top-quality results for your business, drop us a line at info@ascribeinc.ca.

team announcement*

AN EVOLVING AGENCY: ASCRIBE IN 2022

This year marks Ascribe's 15th anniversary — and the beginning of a new chapter. Our team is evolving as the new company ownership and management settle into place. Here are the players ready to serve you:

Alex Dorward, Managing Director: Alex oversees day-to-day operations, keeping the company nimble, efficient and responsive to client needs.

Andrew Kirkwood, Lead Writer and Editorial Reviewer: Andrew leads the editorial team, ensuring ongoing delivery of the quality output our clients depend on.

Dave Hale, Client Lead: Dave handles new work requests, helping our clients define and scope their requirements and set up projects for success.

Christine Serrato, Project Manager: Christine coordinates project execution — setting timelines, managing client needs and ensuring smooth delivery.

Dale Morris, Founder and Strategic Content Advisor: Dale continues to collaborate with the editorial team on strategic projects, guiding creative/concept development and process definition for complex assignments.

If you'd like to book a call to review the new team structure and/or talk about your upcoming projects, reach out to Dave.

style watch*

THE PROS AND CONS OF GRAMMAR-CHECKING SOFTWARE

With Grammarly claiming upwards of 30 million daily users as of 2020 and Microsoft Editor built into every edition of Word, grammar-checking software is ubiquitous and clearly in demand. For professional communicators, are there trade-offs in relying on software to get writing "right"?

Grammar-checking apps have advanced by leaps and bounds. Beyond catching outright errors, they can suggest ways to express ideas more simply and concisely, check punctuation and even evaluate a document's vocabulary level. While this can be enormously helpful, these tools also assert plain language values that can undermine style if they're followed too rigidly.

That's because style is all about choices that allow a writer's voice — or the brand voice of an organization — to come through. Those choices aren't always going to be the most economical or conventional way of expressing an idea: that's what makes them stand out.
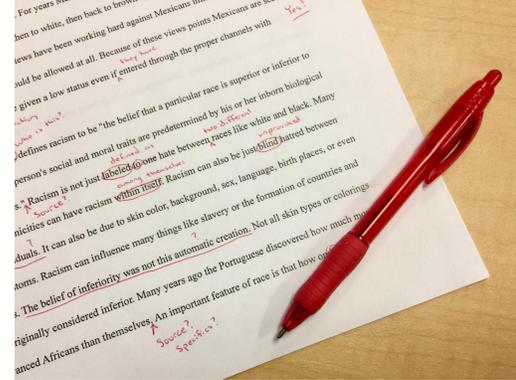
The upshot? We all benefit from the objective analysis of our writing software offers, but the decision to bend a convention or even outright break a rule can keep writing fresh and distinctive. So take that next grammar check with your own personal grain of salt!

content matters*

A VIRTUAL CONFERENCE WITH REAL-WORLD IMPACT

Issues of Substance is the flagship event of the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction (CCSA). It brings together health professionals, researchers, policymakers and others to share knowledge and best practices, aiming to shape a brighter future for people who use substances. In November 2021, we covered the three-day conference — held fully online for the first time ever — capturing the key messages and takeaways of the plenary sessions and panel discussions in a concise, easy-to-read summary report that can be used to drive further discussion on key topics of substance use health.

practice point*

4 TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL VIRTUAL EVENT

As part of our event coverage service, our team has covered a lot of virtual conferences over the past two years. Here are some best practices we've observed to help you get as much value out of an online conference as an in-person one.

Choose the right platform
Different virtual meeting software offers different functionality, from basic video calling to complex, multi-room streaming with full archiving options. Get clear as soon as possible on the features you need for your event and what your chosen platform offers so you can fulfill your vision.

Decide how participants will contribute
Video calls can become chaotic very quickly when people talk over each other and separate conversations unfold in the chat window. Meetings tend to go better when hosts establish a protocol right from the start. We're big fans of the "raise hand" feature offered by most platforms, which allows people to contribute to the discussion in an orderly fashion.

Facilitation is critical
If you have more than half a dozen participants, a good facilitator can really help. They can ask follow-up questions, keep speakers on track and on schedule, and balance speaking time to avoid the conversation being dominated by one or two voices.

Remember tech support
In any large meeting, someone will inevitably have trouble logging in or a spotty internet connection that drops them out unexpectedly. It's wise to have a dedicated support person on hand to help with

troubleshooting or let people back into the right breakout room — so hosts can keep running the event uninterrupted.

Taking care of the technical details *and* being present in the discussion *and* keeping track of everything so you can refer to the key insights and action items later is a big ask. Contact us if you need some reporting support for your next virtual meeting.

shout-out*

NEDIC GETS A MAJOR BOOST FROM THE SLAIGHT FAMILY FOUNDATION

The National Eating Disorder Information Centre (NEDIC) is a longstanding Ascribe client dedicated to raising awareness, sharing lifesaving knowledge, and connecting people to services and supports for eating disorders. In February 2022, NEDIC announced a five-year, $2 million contribution from the Slaight Family Foundation that will help provide client support and develop new resources, including for Black, Indigenous and People of Colour (BIPOC) communities. The entire Ascribe team congratulates NEDIC on the news, and looks forward to continuing to support the Centre's important work going forward.
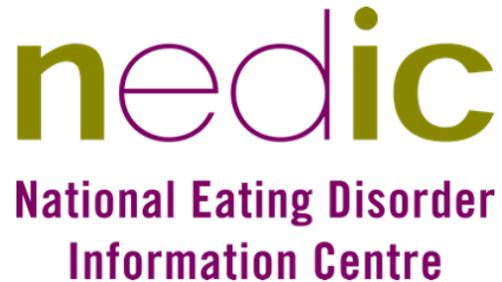
pop*

THE GAME THAT MADE EVERYONE A WORD LOVER

We've always been word lovers at Ascribe — it's kind of our job — but even we were surprised when the massive Wordle craze hit. Six chances to guess a daily five-letter mystery word? How could that be so compelling?

And yet… it is.

Maybe that's partly because Wordle's not just about words and vocabulary: there's also real strategy involved. Do you lock down as many vowels as you can — maybe using "AUDIO" as your starting word? Or do you go all *Wheel of Fortune* and get R-S-T-L-N-E in early as possible?
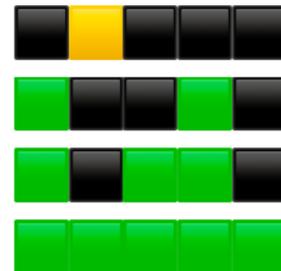
Wordle has spawned a range of imitators. Are you a huge hockey fan? Check out Gordle, where all the answers are players' last names. Have an extensive vocabulary of profanities? Try Lewdle. Want to test your skill in other languages? There are Wordle variations for French, Spanish and a lot more.

Wordle fans have wondered if the game will change since being bought by the *New York Times*; some say it's already gotten harder. But we're undaunted and will continue to take a few minutes each day to guess a new word in as few tries as we can.

wordplay*

SPOT THE FAKE WORD

As we near the end of a long snowy winter, we find ourselves longing for the bold, invigorating colours of a garden in full bloom. Until that becomes a reality, here are a few floral words to consider — can you guess which one we made up?

- **Fleuron** (noun): A flower-shaped ornament, especially in architecture, typography and pastry.
- **Germinigen** (noun): The hormone that triggers germination in seeds.

- **Peduncle** (noun): The stalk bearing a flower or fruit.
- **Petaloid** (adjective): Resembling a flower petal.
- **Vernalize** (verb): Artificially exposing plants to cold temperatures to stimulate flowering.

Highlight below for the answer:

Questions? Suggestions? Send us an email. To find out more about us, visit www.ascribeinc.ca.

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