CONTENT + DESIGN LLC

TEKLA SZYMANSKI
EDITOR@TEKLA-SZYMANSKI.COM

and 10 mistakes to avoid.

Hi [FIRST NAME GOES HERE],

Hopefully, this finds you well. So, why are you receiving this email? Because you have subscribed to this bi-monthly newsletter, downloaded freebies from my website, or have worked with me. Not a right fit? You can unsubscribe at the bottom of the email. (Was this newsletter forwarded to you? Sign up here.*)*

Today's Focus: 10 must-have elements on your website and 10 mistakes to avoid.

[FIRST NAME GOES HERE], ever wonder whether your site follows some best practices and guidelines, or whether you have used elements that you should avoid at all costs?

Website trends change rapidly, but a few rules always apply, regardless of design choices. Here's a list of ten elements that every good website has in common and ten mistakes to correct right now.

Not ready for a complete site overhaul or redesign just yet? Then start improving your website by focusing on the elements to avoid first and eliminate them one by one.

10 elements every good website must have:

- Fast loading time (within 2 seconds). Analyze your site speed here: https://pagespeed.web.dev/.

- A straightforward, clutter-free, simple navigation (if needed: streamlined into sections) that prominently displays your contact info and a search box.

- Responsiveness, meaning the site works both on desktop and mobile, and when visited on mobile, it offers the right amount of content needed and a layout that fits the small screen. Best: design mobile-first (many users will access your site on smaller devices), then add elements for larger screens.

- Trustworthy, safe with high-security standards, using an SSL protocol (**https**://... in the URL), especially if users provide sensitive data.

- High-quality user-centered content and visuals.

- A clear brand and content strategy, a purpose or goal, a great logo and a memorable tagline.

- Answers to all your visitors' questions, pain points and hesitations.

- Only one prominently featured call-to-action per page.

- Ample white space to declutter the design, consistent high-contrast fonts, colors, icons and the same navigation on each page.

- A solid SEO strategy to optimize your website for search ranking.

10 elements to avoid:

- Image carousels or slideshows. Read my take on why to avoid them.

- Static HTML or flash-based websites. Most websites use CMS platforms, like WordPress. Read my blog post on why WordPress works so well.

- Aggressive pop-up windows, flashing/moving banners or too many ads competing with your content.

- No footer; hidden navigation; different/missing navigation on some pages.

- Videos auto-playing after site loads with sound on as default.

- Duplicate, poor, or outdated content.

- Broken internal and external links; internal links set to open in new browser windows/tabs.
- No consistent heading and subheading (H1 and H2) on your content pages.
- Poor color/font choices; too many competing page elements.
- Hard to find or missing contact information and no search option.

With that in mind, that's all for today.

Tekla Szymanski
Content + Design LLC

P.S. Scrolled right to the bottom? No worries. Here are the cliff notes: [FIRST NAME GOES HERE], ever wonder whether your site follows some best practices and guidelines or whether you use elements that you should avoid at all costs? Then scroll back up for a list of the 10 best and the 10 worst practices on your website.

Client feedback: *"Tekla is a strong communicator who truly understands new media and blends the best attributes of print journalism with an in-depth understanding of web design, technology and usability. Her command of several languages offers a unique perspective on communicating succinctly in the new age of brief messages. Her professionalism is impeccable."*

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TEKLA SZYMANSKI
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Errors that you'll never make again.

Hi [FIRST NAME GOES HERE],

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Today's Focus: Grammar mistakes can be avoided if you're vigilant. Especially those that pop up most often.

[FIRST NAME GOES HERE], when you write content, mistakes happen. How many times have you paused and asked yourself if you have used proper spelling and grammar? And even though you diligently use your spellcheck, a few common mistakes still slip through the cracks. But no more. Not to you.

Here are some common grammar mistakes you'll never make again, right?

Loose vs. Lose: If your pants are too loose, you might lose your pants.

Me or I? You would never say, "Give I a call," so you also wouldn't write, "Give Tekla and I a call," but rather, "Give Tekla and me a call." Don't be afraid of me.

Different than or Different from? Things are always different from another.

Improper use of the apostrophe: For singular noun possessives (something belongs to someone), place the apostrophe before the 's'; for plural

nouns, place it after the 's'. "This is my daughter's dog" (I have one daughter). "This is my daughters' dog" (I have more than one daughter). It's = it is; without the apostrophe, "its" becomes possessive: "I have a cat. Its name is Kitty and it's white."

i.e. or e.g.? The former, "i.e.", is a way of saying "in other words." The latter means "for example", so "e.g." is used before specific examples that support an assertion.

Could of, would of, should of: Nope. Never. Always use "could have", "would have", or "should have".

Affect and Effect: affect is a verb; effect is a noun. "Using proper grammar affects your writing to great effect."

Commas: Whether you use a comma before "and" (Oxford comma), or not, is up to you. But be consistent.

With that in mind, that's all for today.

Tekla Szymanski
Content + Design LLC

P.S. Scrolled right to the bottom? No worries. Here are the cliff notes: [FIRST NAME GOES HERE], scroll back up for some common mistakes that seem to pop up often in writing, so you'll never make them again. Ever. Fingers crossed.

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TEKLA SZYMANSKI
EDITOR@TEKLA-SZYMANSKI.COM

==Check your site and strategize==

Hi [FIRST NAME GOES HERE],

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Today's Focus: 5 must-have elements that you need to include on your homepage to convert your site visitors.

[FIRST NAME GOES HERE], have you stumbled upon a website and it took you a while to figure out what it was all about? Did you spend too much time searching for the contact info on a website, or to find out who was behind the services offered? Frustrating, right? But it is more than that. It's unprofessional.

Don't make the same mistakes. Your homepage is your gateway to your customers and clients and with a glance, they should know what sets you apart and what value you can provide to them.

If you want to check how well your homepage is optimized, or if you are thinking of redesigning the whole thing, here are the **5 must-have elements that every homepage needs:**

1. **Your offer.** Tell your site visitors immediately what value you are offering and what it will mean to them to work with you.

2. **Your client's pain point(s).** Show how you have helped others that had

2. **Your client's pain point(s).** Show how you have helped others that had similar problems.

3. **Your values.** Which values set you apart that can help your clients find solutions to their problems.

4. **Yourself.** Show personality, a photo and why you love to do what you do. Why do you care about your work?

5. **Your suggested next steps.** Include a prominent call-to-action: downloading a freebie, scheduling a call or signing up for a newsletter. Give your site visitors one action item to do right now that gives them a quick win so they can move forward with you.

The main goal on your homepage is to provide value to your ideal clients and focus on them, not showcase how great you are. Help them find answers to their questions and their pain points fast. Otherwise, they'll seek out your competition. Not a DIY fan? Contact me for help!

With that in mind, that's all for today.

Tekla Szymanski
Content + Design LLC

P.S. Scrolled right to the bottom? No worries. Here are the cliff notes: [FIRST NAME GOES HERE], the main goal on your homepage is to provide value to your ideal clients and focus on them, not showcase how great you are. Help them find answers to their questions fast. Otherwise, they'll seek out your competition. Scroll back up for the 5 must-have elements every homepage should include.

CONTENT + DESIGN LLC

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[3 free content checklists].

Hi [FIRST NAME GOES HERE],

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Today's Focus: Content overload? 3 checklists and tips to help you rein in your content.

Outdated content weighing your site down? Struggling to move your offline content online? So much to say but not sure where it fits on your current site? Don't worry, help is on the way.

If that sounds like what you're dealing with, I've listed a few tools for you to try, concerning the presentation and flow of your content and how to avoid content overload.

Your readers are drawn to good, valuable long-form narratives and storytelling, especially when it fits the niche they're interested in. Without the right content strategy on your site, however, even the best content leaves your site visitors guessing what you really want to say.

Here are 3 actionable steps that you can take right now to manage, boost, or rein in your content:

1. [Checklist: Perform a Content Audit.](#) Before you can improve your website, you need to assess what content you have to create, update or delete. Use this checklist for a content audit.

2 [Checklist: Create Messages That Convert.](#) A checklist with general points to remember when writing emails, letters, website copy or promotional material.

3. [How-To Article: Recycling Old Content.](#) Learn how to upcycle your older quality content without having to delete it or rewrite it from scratch.

That's all for today.

Tekla Szymanski
Content + Design LLC

P.S. Scrolled right to the bottom? No worries. Here are the cliff notes: [FIRST NAME GOES HERE], outdated content weighing your site down? Struggling to move your offline content online? So much to say but not sure where it fits on your current site? Don't worry, help is on the way. Scroll back up for 3 checklists to rein in your content.

Client feedback: *"Tekla is a strong communicator who truly understands new media and blends the best attributes of print journalism with an in-depth understanding of web design, technology and usability. Her command of several languages offers a unique perspective on how to communicate succinctly in the new age of brief messages. Her professionalism is impeccable."*

From: editor@tekla-szymanski.com
Subject: Protect your website from hackers
Date: December 18, 2021 at 6:21 PM
To: editor@tekla-szymanski.com

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EDITOR@TEKLA-SZYMANSKI.COM

Basic security steps to take right now.

Hi [FIRST NAME GOES HERE],

Hopefully, this finds you well. Why are you receiving this email? Because you have subscribed to this bi-monthly newsletter, downloaded freebies from my website, or have worked with me. Not a right fit? You can unsubscribe at the bottom of the email. (Was this newsletter forwarded to you? Sign up here.)

Today's Focus: You need to proactively lock down your website to be secure.

[FIRST NAME GOES HERE], so, imagine starting your day by checking your site (as you do every day) and all you get is a blank screen. Or worse, you're staring at content that is not yours. You've been hacked. You can't log into your site. You can't fix the problem.

Heart pounding. You're in a panic. Now what? If you had taken a few extra steps to secure your site, this might not have happened.

But you will take those security-enhancing steps right now.

You have to assume that every website visitor is trying to break or spam your site. As soon as your website goes live, it is vulnerable to hacking attempts from outsiders, sometimes in the form of automated bots that bombard it 24/7 in an attempt to log in and wreak havoc.

This scenario is even more likely with poor site maintenance. But don't give up just yet. Security is not a destination but a mindset. Change that and you have a better

chance of preventing your site from going down in flames.

How to Make Your Site More Secure:

Disclaimer: These are basic steps that work for most sites. Your site might have specific security vulnerabilities that need to be addressed, like securing your e-commerce/online shop; subscription and client logins; customer databases; comment/contact forms; chat rooms etc.

- Ask your web host to add a free SSL certificate (https://....) to your site.
- Secure all user WordPress accounts/roles on your site with strong passwords; never use the user name "admin".
- Create Two-Factor Authentication (2FA) for your site login: It uses an authenticator app on your phone or sends an SMS after you enter your password with an additional code to put in. No phone, no login.
- Use a Brute Force Prevention plugin to prevent continuous (automated) login attempts to your site.
- Subscribe to a malware scanning service (i.e. Sucuri). Top-tier hosts will also check your site on a regular basis.
- Make sure your WordPress core and PHP versions are always up-to-date.
- Delete WordPress plugins that are not in use; rely on as few plugins as possible; only use reputable, frequently maintained plugins.
- Update all your plugins and themes as soon as new versions become available.
- And if you can take only one step right now: Set up daily/weekly backups (depending on how often you update your site) and keep them for at least 60 days! Most hosts offer this service. This is crucial: After your site is compromised, you might not immediately notice it. You need a clean backup to remedy any hack.

Not a DIY fan when it comes to your site security, or not sure how to start? I offer affordable monthly [site maintenance plans](#) to take all that off your hands and give you peace of mind.

With that in mind, that's all for today.

Tekla Szymanski
Content + Design LLC

P.S. Scrolled right to the bottom? No worries. Here are the cliff notes: [FIRST NAME GOES HERE], consider the security of your site carefully. Don't just wing it, hope for the best, or that your developer has it all figured out as you stare at a blank screen. Scroll back up for a few basic security steps to take right now.

Client feedback: *"Tekla is a strong communicator who truly understands new media and blends the best attributes of print journalism with an in-depth understanding of web design, technology and usability. Her command of several languages offers a unique perspective on how to communicate succinctly in the new age of brief messages. Her professionalism is impeccable."*

Questions?

- Schedule your FREE 30-minute consultation call with me, discuss your content and design needs and brainstorm solutions. Get a free website critique.
- Email me
- Read my Blog
- Follow me on Twitter
- Engage on my Facebook Business Page
- Visit my Website

CONTENT + DESIGN LLC

TEKLA SZYMANSKI
EDITOR@TEKLA-SZYMANSKI.COM

My favorite services & resources.

Hi [FIRST NAME GOES HERE],

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Today's Focus: My vetted content + design toolbox with favorite services and resources that I use for my site and the websites that I develop for my clients.

These tools help me produce better content, design more functional websites and streamline security, backups and maintenance. They will help you too.

I am an affiliate for some of these resources (links are marked with an +), which means that at no additional cost to you, I may make a small commission each time a purchase is made using my link. I like and recommend these services and am not paid to list them here. I frequently use these services and know that they work well. Your info will never be exposed or reported back to me.

Your Essential Content + Design + Maintenance Toolbox

1. Content Sharing: +Dropbox is the easiest way to share content and large files with my clients.

2. Scheduling: +Acuity is an online tool to schedule appointments. I use this for

prospective clients to schedule our consultation call.

3. Email Campaigns: +ConvertKit is a great tool to create, schedule and manage email campaigns (like the one you're receiving here).

4. Archiving: I use +Evernote to store all my links, screenshots and images for a virtual archive that is stored locally on my computer and synced in the cloud. It captures the pages that I want to keep for further research that I organize in folders. The content is always accessible, even offline, and even when the original source URL changes.

5. Domain Registration: I purchased my own domain with +Network Solutions in 1998—and use it ever since.

6. Site Hosting: +SiteGround is a secure platform (it uses Sucuri scans and monitoring). It offers WordPress migration, free HTTPS (SSL) certification and dedicated WordPress hosting.

7. WordPress Theme: +Kleanity is a clean, minimalist, robust and highly customizable theme.

8. CTA forms: +PopupAlly is an elegant and unobtrusive website form builder for opt-ins and pop-ups that I use on my site as well. It ties in well with +ConvertKit.

9. Security: Sucuri is a paid subscription service; it uses a WordPress plugin that will scan your site regularly and alert you to any down times, blackouts, hacks and security vulnerabilities. If your site is hacked, Sucuri will clean it. It has helped me recover a blog that was hacked and blacklisted by Norton.

10. Backups: ManageWP helps maintain and update WordPress-based websites (it requires a plugin) with one click. It also alerts you when plugins, new WP versions and theme updates are available and schedules a free monthly backup (and restore option) or clone the entire site. I use the paid version to maintain and monitor my clients' websites, when they chose to purchase my Peace of Mind

[maintenance](#) retainer; it lets me schedule more frequent and thorough backups for them.

That's all for today.

Tekla Szymanski
Content + Design LLC

P.S. Scrolled right to the bottom? No worries. Here are the cliff notes: [FIRST NAME GOES HERE], please reach out to me if you need help with your site content and design or your narrative. Just reply to this email with your questions or feedback—or schedule a [FREE 30-minute consultation call](#) online with me to discuss your content and design needs, brainstorm solutions or receive a website critique.

P.P.S. I personally read and answer your email replies.

Client feedback: *"Tekla is a strong communicator who truly understands new media and blends the best attributes of print journalism with an in-depth understanding of web design, technology and usability. Her command of several languages offers a unique perspective on how to communicate succinctly in the new age of brief messages. Her professionalism is impeccable."*

From: editor@tekla-szymanski.com
Subject: Create great content 101
Date: December 18, 2021 at 6:23 PM
To: editor@tekla-szymanski.com

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TEKLA SZYMANSKI
EDITOR@TEKLA-SZYMANSKI.COM

5 tips to connect with your audience.

Hi [FIRST NAME GOES HERE],

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Today's Focus: 5 recommended links on creating good content.

[FIRST NAME GOES HERE], in this newsletter, you've read many times that good content—storytelling and connecting with your audience when planning, designing and updating your website—is essential. Or, to quote A. A. Milne: " 'I'm scared,' said Piglet. 'A story will help,' said Pooh. 'How?' 'Don't you know? Stories make the heart grow.' "

But don't take only Pooh's or my word for it. Here are a few links to articles that make the same argument and that I believe can be useful to you too.

✓ **How to Create Content that People Want to Read**. A short cartoon guide by John P. Weiss. "The best writing and stories move us in some way. They tap into our emotions. We can all relate to loss, love, forgiveness, inspiration and hope. No matter what you're writing about, if you can infuse honest emotion into your work, you'll connect with more people."

✓ **Web Copy Techniques that Alienate Users and How Not to Use Them** by

InVision. "It's important to remember that copy is unique for every website, just like a design. It should be built with a specific audience in mind, and with a specific purpose—that purpose will dictate the boundaries of how you communicate."

✓ **Why You Can't Abandon the Written Word** by John Hall. "Writing isn't an antiquated skill best left in your school days. Written communication is essential. After all, we're human beings, no matter how much technology we have, and our 'rudimentary' skills allow us to work through things in the best, most humane way possible."

✓ **The Importance of Storytelling in Design** by Addison Duvall. "A story isn't that complicated after all. Everyone already knows the basics. The key is incorporating it effectively in the way you communicate with your clients and your viewers."

✓ **Creating Good Content Will Never be A Rush Job** by Fi Shailes. "Of all the assumptions non-marketers have dared make about aspects of marketing, one, in particular, continues to pop its head up and irritate me deeply—and that is a general idea that 'creating good content is a really quick process'."

(At the time of writing, all links worked. Should a link be broken when this email lands in your inbox, please hit reply and alert me, so that I can fix it. I appreciate your time. Thank you!)

That's all for today.

Tekla Szymanski
Content + Design LLC

From: editor@tekla-szymanski.com
Subject: Old content? Refresh it!
Date: December 18, 2021 at 6:23 PM
To: editor@tekla-szymanski.com

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TEKLA SZYMANSKI
EDITOR@TEKLA-SZYMANSKI.COM

Recycle your content and get more exposure.

Hi [FIRST NAME GOES HERE],

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Today's Focus: How to refresh and recycle your old content and get more exposure for it.

Sometimes, the shoemaker has no shoes. Since I am a web designer and work with websites all day long, you'd think I would take care of my own website first. Wrong.

In 2018, 20 years after I hand-coded the very first iteration of my site, I finally redesigned the thing and brought it to its current state.

Granted, my site went through many versions since I first launched it, but until 2017, it was still an old non-responsive HTML-based website that looked terrible on mobile, with a separate WordPress-powered blog on my domain (that blog was once hacked and blacklisted by Norton Securities. Yes, really, it happened to me.)

What I was also dealing with was a lot of old content and the question of what to do with it during the redesign: delete, refresh & upcycle or rewrite? What helped me in what seemed like a huge undertaking was that over the years, I had accumulated a

lot of evergreen content that could easily be refreshed and moved over to the new site.

You can use your older content in many ways without having to delete it or rewrite it from scratch. This is called upcycling, meaning the same content is refreshed and then repurposed on various platforms. As a best practice, schedule to go over your site regularly to flag outdated content. And when writing new content, make sure that it is as timeless as possible or can easily be updated.

Here's how to get started:

Refreshing Outdated Content

- Go over each post/article regularly and update/add new links and resources and get rid of old and broken external links. If you use WordPress, you can use plugins like Broken Link Checker to help you find links to update.
- Ask yourself what needs to be added, removed, or fine-tuned in the article.
- Find up-to-date statistics/data/infographics to add to your refreshed content.
- Take out words like "last week", "the previous month" etc and insert years or specific dates. When writing new content, only use specific dates/years going forward.
- Combine articles/blog posts that are too old to refresh easily into a new piece of content. Expand on your initial idea (what has changed since the piece was written?) and take the big-picture evergreen point of view.
- And sometimes, too old content just needs to be deleted.

Upcycling Existing Content

- Do you have videos on your site? Split them into smaller segments, add an intro graphic and post on social media.
- Use the transcripts of these videos and create short blog posts. This way, you get content that you already have into the hands of more people.
- You can also reformat an old piece of written content and transform it into a

short video: this way that blog post can be highlighted on a different content platform, like YouTube.

- Pitch your refurbished content on other platforms, as a guest post, or discuss as a guest speaker on a podcast.
- Use an older blog post as a script outline for your own podcast on the same topic and expand on it.
- Use your best quotes from your content and create compelling images that you can easily share on social media (with a link to the original piece!). Use a free tool like Venngage which has a range of easy-to-edit templates for social media images, visuals and infographics.
- Maybe repurpose a comprehensive, longer piece as a downloadable PDF, with added visuals and content, for your email sales funnel or sales offer?
- You could also split up (batch) longer content and add it to an email series or package it for other formats to tell your story over time.
- Use a social media tool to automate your posts and be consistent. I like to use MeetEdgar: I upload my content, choose my social media platforms, batch everything into categories and the program randomly selects pieces at the time I have selected and posts them automatically. Rinse and repeat.

And there you have it: Don't let older content go to waste and save yourself time! A bit of housekeeping will give you new content that offers genuine, up-to-date value, answers questions and finds solutions to your readers' pain points. It'll be shareworthy and will increase your exposure to potential clients, customers, or donors. And always remember to link back to your site!

[FIRST NAME GOES HERE], please reach out to me if you need help with refreshing and upcycling your content. Just reply to this email with your questions— or schedule a FREE 30-minute consultation call online to brainstorm solutions or receive a website critique of your current site and get tips on how to improve it.

That's all for today.

Tekla Szymanski

Content + Design LLC

P.S. Scrolled right to the bottom? No worries. Here are the cliff notes: Every website has stale content. You can save time by refreshing and recycling your outdated content—and then repurposing it on other platforms to get even more exposure. Please reach out to me if you need help with your content audit. Just reply to this email with your questions or feedback—or schedule a FREE 30-minute consultation call online with me to discuss your content and design needs, brainstorm solutions or receive a website critique.

P.P.S. I personally read and answer your email replies.

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