asterisk*

Insights and smart practices from your content team
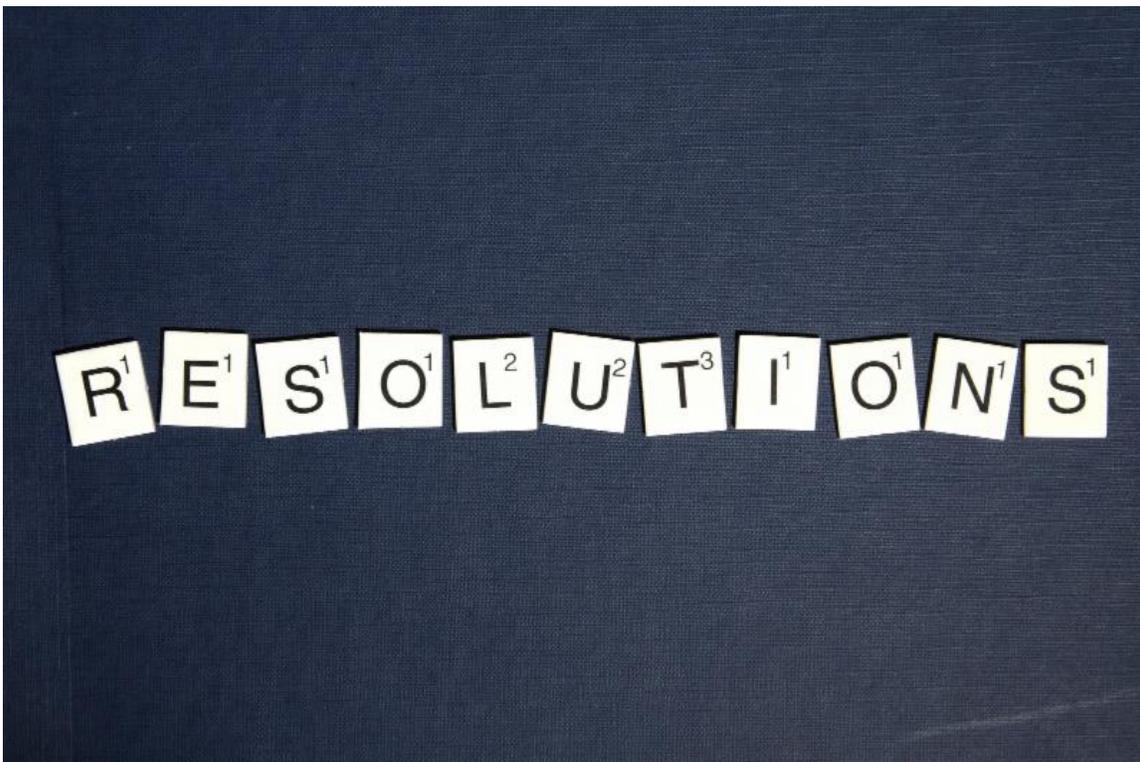
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feature*

RESOLUTIONS FOR BETTER MARKETING COPY

The new year often brings resolutions to lose weight, trim down and tone up. In 2016, why not make that commitment to your marketing copy? Get your content lean and mean by saying no to do-nothing words and phrases.

You know the ones we mean. Those bloated word-clumps that give writing the slow and heavy feeling

Uncle Al complains of after scarfing down a third helping of turkey dinner: *in order to*, *in terms of*, *in keeping with...*

Because these phrases are so familiar and time-worn, they have a way of sneaking in unnoticed. Here are some ways to keep them at bay:

- **Watch the beginnings of sentences.** That's where a lot of do-nothing phrases lurk. Why say, "It is important to note that resource optimization matters," when you could just get to it with, "Resource optimization matters"? Trust your reader to know it's important to note because you're noting it.

- **Stay on the lookout for unnecessary words.** Phrases like "end results" or "the month of January" or "in the province of Ontario" can all be much leaner. Results come at the end, so "end" isn't needed. January is a month, so just say "January." Ditto Ontario: it's a province, and unless you're writing for an audience outside of Canada who may not know that, you can probably get away with just saying "in Ontario."

- **Use active voice -- subject/verb/object.** Avoid passive constructions, leading clauses and convoluted wording. Something like, "Business income reporting schedules determine fiscal year assessment mailing," is confusing partly for its string of nouns and partly because the subject -- the mailing -- comes at the end. "When we mail your fiscal year assessment depends on when you report your business income," is clearer and to the point.

Following these practices will make your content tighter, lighter and more readable -- and could very well be one of the easiest New Year's resolutions to keep!

P.S. Here are some other empty phrases to guard against:

- it can be seen that
- from the viewpoint of
- in the event that
- few in number
- In addition to

punc'd*

PITY THE POOR PERIOD.

The exclamation mark shouts. The question mark interrogates. The em-dash interjects.

And the period just, well, stops.

But stopping matters. Until around 2,500 years ago, most texts looked like this:

Ihavebeenlivinginottawaforyearsiwasborninvancouveritwasalwaysraining

Zero punctuation -- not even spaces. Once words gained some breathing room, the obvious next step was to mark the end of sentences.

Aristophanes of Byzantium introduced the first period (or "full stop," as the British call it) in the third century BC. His looked like our modern version but refused to stay put, appearing first at the top of the line, then at the midline (acting like today's semicolon), then at the bottom of the line with comma-like

proclivities.

Eventually, the top line dot dropped down to the bottom and became the period we know and love.

But how much do we really love it?

According to a recent article in the New York Times, for many young text messagers the period feels harsh, even aggressive, and they avoid it. After centuries of use and evolution, has the period reached *its* final stop -- to be replaced by emoticons? :o

content matters*

ALCATEL-LUCENT GOES VIRAL

Last year, Alcatel-Lucent tried something different to help its Large Enterprise solutions stand out, creating an innovative, comedic web series about a CIO trying to modernize IT at a multinational corporation. Season one of The New Guy was such a hit -- garnering as many as 74,000 YouTube views per episode -- that the company brought it back again in 2015. Ascribe was proud to write a series of downloadable eBooks to accompany the latest webisodes.

shout-out*

ROYAL CANADIAN MINT GOES FOR GOLD

Ascribe wishes the Royal Canadian Mint the best of luck as it competes for top honours at the 2016 Coin of the Year Awards, to be presented during next month's World Money Fair in Berlin. The Mint's numismatic, circulation and bullion coins earned a record-setting 12 nominations across nine categories, including Best Historical Coin, Best Contemporary Coin, Best Gold Coin, Best Silver Coin and Most Innovative Coin.

pop*

THE GEEZER'S GUIDE TO SOCIAL MEDIA

(Or, everything you ever wanted to know about social but were afraid to ask.)

At a recent Ascribe roundtable, a few of the more, um, "mature" members of our team had some questions about the fast-changing landscape of social media tools and apps. In getting them up to speed we put together a little primer we thought might be worth sharing with our asterisk* readers. Here's the rundown:

Whisper		A public confessional where people are sharing their deepest, darkest secrets and getting comfort -- or shame -- from total strangers.
Periscope		For someone who feels like streaming their life in real time.
Vine		This generation's version of *Funniest Home Videos* -- short, usually goofball clips shared online.
Twitter		The telegram of the 21st century. An endless array of 140-character messages about anything and everything.
Hashtag		A sign that drives content trends. No period needed. #literallyanywords

practice point*

MAKING TRACK CHANGES MORE MANAGEABLE

We've all had to deal with it at some time or other: a Word document that's been seen by so many reviewers there's an entire rainbow of changes to piece together. But what if you want to see only the CFO's edits? It's easy enough to isolate comments and markups from specific reviewers:

- Click "Show Markup"
- Mouse over "Reviewers"
- Select the people whose changes you want to see

To accept or reject the changes of just those reviewers -- leaving intact all the other tracked changes:

- Click the tiny arrow beside "Accept" or "Reject"
- Choose "Accept/Reject All Changes Shown"

The "Show Markup" menu also lets you show or hide "Formatting" and "Insertions and Deletions." That means you can view and clear out just the formatting changes while keeping additions or deletions visible -- perfect for focusing on the content rather than changes to fonts or line spacing.

storytelling*

Some stories take hold of the imagination in especially powerful ways. On December 18, 2015, one such tale -- Star Wars -- got a world-thrilling reboot. But the seeds of that story were actually planted a long time ago...

1949
Joseph Campbell's book, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, points out that 99% of all myths, legends and stories are exactly the same. Originality and creativity are all in the telling.

1977
With a plot straight from Campbell's "bible," George Lucas makes a little movie called *Star Wars* and completely reinvents how films are made and consumed forever after.

2015

Luke, Han and Leia return to the big screen for the first time in 32 years in *The Force Awakens*, the record-smashing *Star Wars* sequel that brings in $528.9M worldwide during its opening weekend alone.

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

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