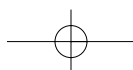


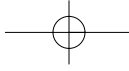
# KILLER WEB CONTENT

**Make the sale**  
**Deliver the service**  
**Build the brand**

Gerry McGovern

A & C BLACK • LONDON





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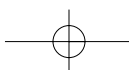
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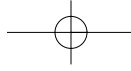
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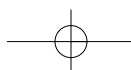
This book is only possible because I have for many years had the privilege to meet thousands of people from all over the world. From Auckland, New Zealand to Abilene, Texas; from Reykjavik, Iceland, to Taipei, Taiwan, I've learned an awful lot and shared a few laughs.

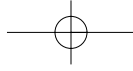
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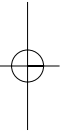
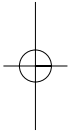
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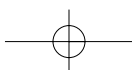
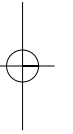
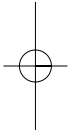
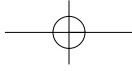




# PART ONE: THE THEORY

It may work in  
practice, but does  
it work in theory?





# 1 DO YOU HAVE THE KILLER INSTINCT?

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**A small percentage of Web content really makes a difference. It makes the sale, delivers the service, and builds the brand. This is the killer Web content. It probably represents less than 10% of content published on the Web, because – let's face it – most content just gets in the way.**

Up until now, content has been a hugely undervalued asset. In the early years of the Web, the focus was on the technical. Then it shifted to visual design. Only now are people recognizing that quality content is the essence of what makes a website successful. The Web runs on content. It is its hidden asset, its gold. Yet for so long it has been treated like coal – a low-grade, low-cost commodity best published in bulk.

## In a world where everyone is publishing, how is your content going to stand out?

Do you have a nose for killer Web content? Do you have a gut instinct for when content is working and when it isn't? If you do have the killer content instinct, then *Killer Web Content* will hone it to a fine point. If you haven't fully developed it, then *Killer Web Content* will help you to understand the difference between the killer and the filler.

The opportunity to create content has never been greater. We are living through a text revolution – from e-mails to mobile phone texting, from websites to blogging, the world has gone mad for

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## KILLER WEB CONTENT

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words. So you'll need to be sure your skills in creating killer Web content are well honed. Because if your content isn't the killer stuff, how on earth is it going to stand out, and who on earth is going to bother reading it? I have been involved in the Web since 1994 and have always taken a content first, technology second approach. In the early years, that was a hard sell. Nobody wanted to listen. Now they do. I have never seen such interest in Web content. This is a hot subject with great career prospects and huge career potential.

### WEB CONTENT FINALLY COMES OF AGE

I have talked about Web content in 35 countries and in many parts of the United States, and I've got really good news for you: interest in Web content is on the rise. Every year, I get better and bigger audiences who really care about content. They know it is a valuable asset that, if managed well, can deliver tremendous value.

**Through analysis and testing, you can find out which content works and which doesn't.**

As a result of years of analysis and testing, I have discovered that there is a science to content. It may not be a hard science that has rigid formulae, but there are ways to write a sentence that will get a reaction from San Francisco to Singapore, and from Reykjavik to Rome. And there are sentences that nobody will respond to in these and other places. Across cultures and markets, there are words that work and words that don't. Words that make the sale. Words that lose the sale.

I have assembled 17 different summaries that relate to the Apple iTunes music service. I have shown these summaries to over 2,000 people in 13 countries, and have asked them to quickly choose their

## DO YOU HAVE THE KILLER INSTINCT?

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favorite. One summary is chosen first in practically every country. In fact, 49% of people chose this particular summary. That's extraordinary. And what's equally extraordinary is that some of the summaries weren't chosen by anyone. (We'll see later what the killer and filler summaries were.)

### **BUT THE WEB IS FULL OF FILLER**

I used to be a music journalist. In the music industry there is the concept of "filler." Basically, the average album has ten to 14 tracks. Some artists have only five to seven good tracks ready to record, so they need to write another five to seven to complete the album. Typically, these are sub-standard tracks and are known as "the filler."

The Web is full of filler content. Generally, this content has been directly transplanted from print and doesn't serve any other purpose than to give a website some bulk. In Chapter 10 we'll learn about a company that used simply to place its brochures on its websites. Sales were flat; so it decided to create quality Web content. Year-on-year results showed an increase in sales by more than 100%.

The press release – a staple of most corporate websites – is a good example of print content that gets published because it's the easy way out. Originally, press releases were not meant to be published. Instead, they were supposed to be released to the press as a story "hook" – something that might get them interested in writing a story in their publications.

Your website is your publication. You should be taking your press release ideas and turning them into compelling stories that communicate clear messages your customers care about. Simply putting press releases up is the lazy way out. Most of your customers care to read your press releases about as much as they'd care to open a bag of two-week-old fish.

## KILLER WEB CONTENT

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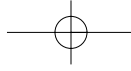
Right now, Web metrics are relatively primitive. However, metrics tools are improving. Within the next five years, the Web will become a communications channel where content can truly be analyzed and identified as “killer” or “filler.” Look around you and you will see that many organizations are publishing reams and reams of filler content – just to fill up space, just because that’s what’s always been done, just because that’s the job someone’s been paid to do, just because it’s so much easier to churn out filler than to hone the killer stuff.

From the best websites, the filler will be weeded out slowly but surely, and the people who create it will either have to find new roles or be retrained. (In fact, this is happening today in organizations such as Microsoft.) If you create killer content, on the other hand, you will be highly valued and highly rewarded, because it is this content that will be making the sale, delivering the service, and building the brand.

### THE ESSENCE OF WEBSITE SUCCESS

I was once told a fascinating story by a friend of mine who is involved in the investment banking industry. Investment bankers were looking for investors in what they were calling “third-world economies”. Nobody was having much luck. Then some banker started calling them “emerging economies” and there was a phenomenal increase in investment – all because of a couple of words.

*Fortune* magazine had a similar experience. For years, it had been publishing a supplement on retirement options with headlines like “Better Plans for Retirement.” Then someone came up with the idea of using the headline “Retire Rich.” Those two words resulted in a huge jump in sales, making that issue the most successful in the company’s history.



## DO YOU HAVE THE KILLER INSTINCT?

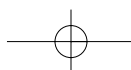
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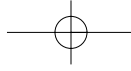
**Your customers have a small set of words that summarize what they care about. Find those words, and you're half way to success.**

Words matter, and I aim to prove to you that they have never mattered more than they do today. In this hectic world, we are inundated with so much stuff that we simply home in on the things we care about. And we express what we care about in a small set of words – I call these words “carewords.” I could call them “keywords,” but then you’d yawn and put the book down. The problem is that – like “third-world economies” – the word itself is uninspiring. Of course, the way keywords have been used hasn’t helped. Many people think that they are something you quickly add to the HTML of a page and have only a loose association with the actual content. Keywords are also associated with metadata, a word so boring it deserves a health warning. So I’m going to call them “carewords” from now on.

Listen up: the secret of Web communications and marketing success is to be found in the concept of carewords. There’s something in them that has explosive potential, something that gets to the essence of modern human behavior. As Web readers, we are hunter-gatherers once again – only this time, instead of scanning the horizon for prey, we scan pages for carewords. When we see these words, we click, we act. And that is what the Web is all about: tasks and actions.

What do most people care about when flying today? Low fares or free coffee? You’d probably say low fares. When people go to a search engine, are they more likely to type “low fares” or “cheap





## KILLER WEB CONTENT

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flights”? Suppose I told you that one of these careword phrases is 400 times more likely to be typed into a search engine than the other. Wouldn't it be important for you to know that if you were working as a marketer for an airline?

*Killer Web Content* will give you simple, robust techniques to identify the carewords of your customers. Developed over ten years of research and practical experience, these techniques eliminate the filler and let you focus on the killer Web content.

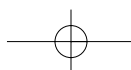
### MAKE YOUR CONTENT STAND OUT IN THE CROWD

Every day, millions of people use search engines. As a marketer or communicator, it is important for you to understand their behavior when they are searching. By analyzing how our customers search, we learn a lot about what is important to them.

## Focus on how people search, not on how search engines work.

What is called “search engine optimization” is becoming an important part of business. However, some of its practitioners are missing a vital point: you shouldn't focus your energies on optimizing content for each of the various search engines. That's a short-term strategy. Optimizing your content for how and why your customers search is a much more robust and long-term strategy, because, if you optimize for how people search, you are in fact also optimizing for search engines. The business model of most search engines is based on getting the right result to the right person as quickly as possible. The perfect search engine would give you one result – the exact content that you require.

If you think about how and why your customers search and create your content based on that thinking, then you help your customers.



## DO YOU HAVE THE KILLER INSTINCT?

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And, if you help your customers, you help yourself. *Killer Web Content* will help you to create content that works well for people who search, and thus works well with search engines.

### FOCUS ON THE TASK

Writing for the Web is not the same as writing for print. One of the key differences is that, when people use the Web, they are relentlessly task-focused. They want to do something, and they want to do it as quickly and as painlessly as possible.

My wife's sister is a Roman Catholic nun. The last time she visited us, the conversation came around to the Web. (It invariably does, when I'm steering.) She likes the Web but said that she finds it very frustrating. I was a bit surprised. I would have expected that a nun, trained in contemplation and silence, would show more patience and serenity. Not so.

She is an expert in counseling and often turns to the Web to check the latest research. She told me about how annoyed she gets when she clicks on a search result that turns out to be irrelevant. I asked her how she did her research before the Web and she threw her head back: it was very much harder before the Web.

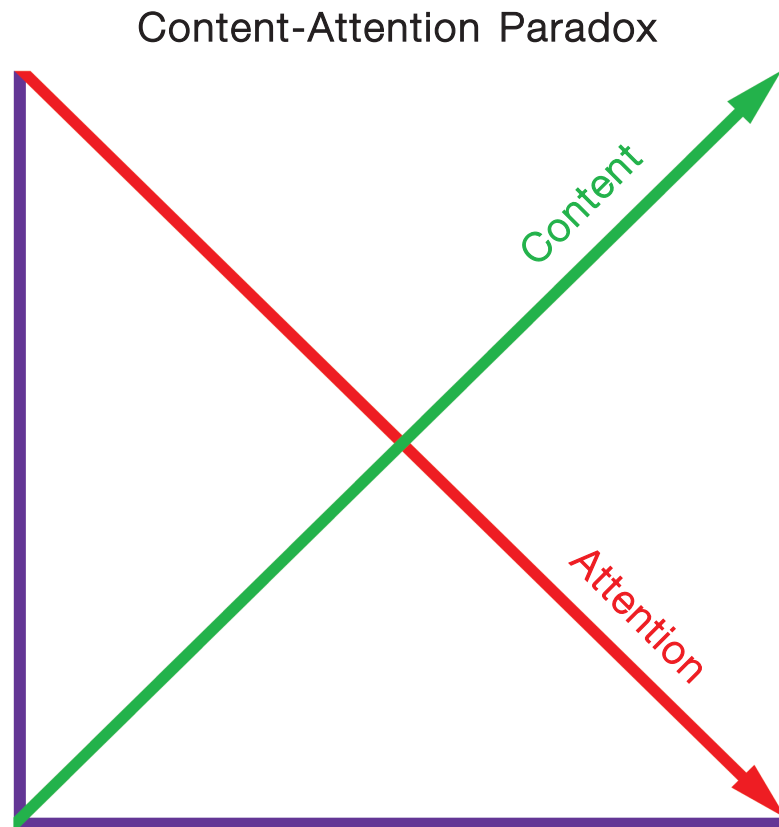
I thought about this for quite a while, and I realized that she was merely expressing something very human – we tend to forget quickly a major inconvenience of the past and focus on a relatively minor inconvenience of the present.

Getting in a car and driving to a library would have taken far more time than clicking on a number of irrelevant results. But that's not what matters to people using the Web. The pre-Web is the distant past. It is the now, the moment, that matters. And every moment that is wasted by clicking on an irrelevant result leads to frustration.

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## KILLER WEB CONTENT

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The Web is the land of attention deficit syndrome. You must deal with the content-attention paradox: you have so much to publish, yet people have so little attention to give. Attention is like an elastic band: it will stretch so much and then it will snap. People's eyes dart across pages, scanning impatiently. What's the most popular button on the browser? The "Back" button. To paraphrase Arnold Schwarzenegger, if you lose the attention of your reader because your page is badly organized and/or you've got filler content, they hit the back button, muttering: "I won't be back."

## DO YOU HAVE THE KILLER INSTINCT?

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The vast majority of people come to your website to do something specific, and they want to get in and out as quickly as possible. Identifying the most important tasks that people come to your website to complete, and helping them do so as quickly and efficiently as possible, will be critical to the success of your website.

### FROM GETTING ATTENTION TO GIVING ATTENTION

Someone once said that the difference between traditional marketing and Web marketing is the difference between getting attention and giving attention. I couldn't agree more.

Let's say I want to get your attention and you're on the other side of a busy road. I will probably wave and shout. Let's say I get your attention and you cross the road and come to me. What should I do now? Should I keep waving at you and shouting in your face? It probably wouldn't be a good idea.

A lot of websites are waving and shouting in their customers' faces. Big fancy intro pages, flash animations, and pop ups are all attention-getting strategies, when what's needed is to *give* some attention. Why? Because the customer has made a deliberate decision to visit us; we've *already* got their attention. Now they want to do something. They want some questions answered and they don't want anything to get in the way.

**If you use attention-getting strategies on your website, you stand a strong chance of really annoying your customers.**

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## KILLER WEB CONTENT

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Giving attention is about facilitating the quick and easy completion of a task. It is about having answers to the most important questions your customer has. Giving attention is what Google, Yahoo, and eBay do.

Most advertising agencies that I come across have absolutely awful websites. They're all flash and no substance, all getting attention and very little giving attention. They are so obsessed with being seen to be original that they've become ridiculous.

Take J. Walter Thompson, for example. Instead of having a "clients" section, they have a section called "name dropping." Click on that and you will find a list of clients. But it's not your usual list – no: someone photographed a business card folder. Very cool. The problem is that there are so many business cards per page it is hard to read them; so you don't actually know who some of these clients are.

Take Saatchi & Saatchi as another example. When you arrive at their website, you're presented with a big swinging logo that alternates between "Saatchi & Saatchi" and "Ideas & Ideas." There isn't a *skip intro* option, so you are forced to watch this fatuous parade for about 15 seconds. Then you are sent to a splash page where you're given two choices:

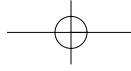
**select high-speed**

Click here to see how ideas  
can come from anywhere.

**select low speed**

Click here for just the facts.

These two choices say a lot about advertising thinking. If you're a poor, miserable wretch on low bandwidth, I'm afraid it'll have to be just the facts, but, if you've got broadband, well, we'll give you all these wonderful ideas. High speed = creativity. Low speed = the boring facts. Tell that to Google, the ultimate low-speed website. Isn't it funny how it has managed to build such a global brand by being low speed and functional?



## DO YOU HAVE THE KILLER INSTINCT?

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**The Web works best as a no-frills, functional place. A great website gets to the point. It is useful.**

This is not a rant against graphics, animation, or creativity. It is very important that your website is visually pleasing. However, it is much more important that your website is *useful*. Websites that are popular and profitable are useful – they allow people to do something practical.

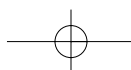
### THE CUSTOMER IS STILL KING

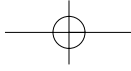
So much changes; so much remains the same. As a marketer and communicator, the skills that you have been taught are absolutely relevant when it comes to the Web. As communicators, we are all taught to think of the reader. As marketers we are taught to put the customer first.

If there is one underlying problem that I have found in every one of the countries I have done Web work in, it is the difficulty organizations have in truly putting the customer first on the Web. Many organizations want to put the customer first, but organizational inertia or the daily grind of work usually shoves such noble aspirations to the side.

**Genuinely putting the customer first is a winning formula on the Web. Ask Amazon or Google.**

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## KILLER WEB CONTENT

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For now and for the future, the most important competitive advantage you can have is a deep understanding of what your customers care about and a relentless focus on helping your customers to fulfill their needs. *Killer Web Content* will show you simple, proven methods that will help you to put your customers first today and always.

### WHO THIS BOOK IS FOR

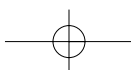
*Killer Web Content* is for you if you know that merely creating content is not enough. If you believe that getting people to read your content and to act on what they have read is where the real test lies, then this book is definitely for you.

It is for professional marketers and communicators. The natural home of a public website is with marketing; the natural home of an intranet is with communications. However, *Killer Web Content* is also for IT (information technology) people who would like to focus more on the I in IT.

This book is for bloggers. If you've got an opinion and you want to express it on the Web, then you want to ensure that your content has the best chance of being read. Otherwise, you would be better off keeping what you have to say in a private diary. *Killer Web Content* will help your content stand out in the crowd.

It's also for middle and senior managers. Unless you intend to retire in the next five years, you cannot ignore content management. This is a critical new management discipline. Content is now an asset, a driver of sales, of service delivery, of productivity, a builder of brand. You must understand how to get the maximum value from your content for the minimum cost. *Killer Web Content* will show you how.

This book is not just about commerce – it's about websites that need to drive actions. I've done a lot of work with government websites over the years. The best government website creators realize that



## DO YOU HAVE THE KILLER INSTINCT?

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they too are in the business of sales and marketing and that they need to sell and market the uptake of online services. They need to convince the skeptical citizen that doing business with government is easier and faster on the Web.

The universities which are making the Web work are focusing on killer Web content. Universities are often hotbeds of politics and ego. Under the guise of academic freedom, university websites can become a tangle of different designs, overflowing with filler content.

*Killer Web Content* is for those running intranets, too. Some organizations take the awful view that because it's "only staff" they can afford to pile in lots of poor quality, badly organized content. The best intranets know that they can't take their staff for granted and that they need to enable them to quickly find content that will help them to do their jobs better.

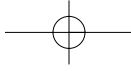
I'll tell you who this book is not for. It's not for the "put-it-upper." That, unfortunately, is how so many websites – intranets in particular – are still managed. Treating content like bags of potatoes or coal doesn't work if you want to derive any value from it.

Historically, the Web has been seen as the responsibility of IT. That was understandable when the Web was new and nobody other than technical people really understood it.

The printer was the rock star of the 15th century. Yes, it was sex 'n' drugs 'n' printing. Printers – people who produced print, that is – were invited to dine with princes and kings. That's because the Gutenberg printing process had just been invented and everyone thought that printing was cool.

When the 16th century arrived, the printer was old news. The new cool was publishing, and the hip dude was now the publisher.

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## KILLER WEB CONTENT

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The fascination with *how* books were published had waned. People were now fascinated with what was actually in them – the content.

Every time a new technology comes along, there is a period of fascination with the technology itself. That is exactly what happened with the World Wide Web. However, the technology is beginning to settle and mature, and the best website creators know that it's the content that counts now.

So, there's a big shift happening – a shift away from the mechanics of the Web towards the content – and I certainly believe that marketers and communicators are in the perfect position to benefit from this shift. Because it is they, more than anyone, who should understand that on the Web it is content that makes the sale, delivers the service, and builds the brand.

And what is the first golden rule of killer Web content? *Less is more.*

