

Marketing Hype: Why It Doesn't Work on the Web

by [Karyn Zoldan](#)

Comedian Joan Rivers was ahead of her time. Little did she know that her famous line, "Can we talk?" would be ever so meaningful on the web.

Contrary to other mediums, the web invites a personal one-to-one dialogue that I call humanization. When used correctly, humanization makes the difference between a successful site and one that is rarely visited. Here are a few do's and don'ts to erase hype and renew the human element.

Do consider who is reading your site:

- Generation Y has virtually been teathed on the web and bombarded prenatally. Idealistic in nature, they draw their own conclusions based on factual experience.
- Gen X, accused of being indifferent and unmotivated, allegedly live in a slacker society where superlatives are not part of their vocabulary.
- Baby boomers have been around the block or three. Unlike their parents who believe that doctors are gods, baby boomers seek out alternative medicine, second opinions and comb the web for substantiated information.
- Pre-baby boomers, a small slice of the online pie, are more polite and not as critical as their later counterparts.

Let's start by considering them as human beings vs. demographic sectors.

Do let them know WIIFM (What's in it for me?)

If humans don't find the answer to the WIIFM conundrum on the home page, consider them history. The home page must propel them to further clicking, finding more answers, building trust, and perhaps buying. One of the biggest complaints I hear from my clients is, "No one goes beyond my home page". It's no surprise when the home page is all about the client and not a word how it relates to the human. Generously use the words, "you" and "your" instead of "we" and "our."

Do be aware of web usage

Humans use the web to find information. Although they may spend hours with eyeballs glazed over a monitor and fingers glued to a mouse, they want information in bite-sized chunks or bulleted lists. According to efuse.com, reading onscreen is more difficult than reading print media so scanning keywords is essential. Brevity not pomposity rules.

Don't talk AT your humans

Forget buzzwords. Ban the word "paradigm" from your vocabulary forever! In our global marketplace, buzzwords cease to buzz for all. Ditto for jargon-speak, if a human doesn't know what an acronym means or has to guess the meaning of your message, you are no longer talking TO them.

Don't use superlatives

Unlike a respected newspaper or magazine, the human is clueless of the ethics supporting a website. Keep adjectives like "best," "great," "the ultimate" restricted to your board meetings; these words create distrust. Instead use words conveying passion by being direct, funny and genuine. Obviously you can't be funny if you're selling urns for cremated pets so be honest and earnest. Show the human you are the greatest vs. telling them.

Do request feedback

Conversations create relationships. Revel in the capacity to interact with your human. Don't just offer them page after page of reading material. Offer them polls, short quizzes, feedback links. Engage their opinion and then acknowledge their participation.

Television has taken advantage of the web by asking humans to log onto their website regarding polls and programming. It's a dynamic idea to get humans to your site and elicit participation.

I would take it one step further and, to the best of my knowledge, no one is doing it yet--rate my commercial. While watching a commercial for XYZcompany, the human reads an onscreen message

to log onto www.XYZcompany.com and rate the commercial. It can also apply to a print ad. When they get to the site, don't take them on a scavenger hunt for the feedback feature; be thoughtful and offer a direct route to the bull's-eye. After collecting feedback, any number of applications can be used to continue the dialogue, build alliances and further trust.

Do think different

As a former teacher I cringe about billboards and print media teaching children to write incorrect grammar, but look at the success Apple had by painting the computer horizon with grape and blueberry iMacs. Now I'm asking you to think differently about your website.

Pretend you're having a conversation with a friend whom you haven't seen for awhile. What would you tell them about your site? Take this approach to write a site free of corporate rhetoric. Tell a story why your company is different from similar companies...and please don't quote the mission statement. Tell why the company is in business but speak from your heart instead of a PowerPoint presentation. Now that you have been sincere, trim the excess and highlight your keywords.

If these do's and don'ts make you a little apprehensive, you're not alone. It's a brave new e-world with innovative commandments conceived at warp web speed. Let's go for a ride on the [Cluetrain Manifesto!](#)



Karyn Zoldan is a freelance writer and marketer. Using her intuition and street marketing smarts, she grew a start-up dating telephony company and doubled its gross revenues (in the millions) in one year. Currently she's president of her own company, [Bridge Marketing](#), and likes to work with humans who value her left of center ideas.