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SIX STEPS TO MORE SUCCESSFUL ENTERPRISE WEB CONTENT PROJECTS

Lisa Calhoun, MBA

You will learn:

- How to sleep at night because your **web content project** is performing
- How to figure out **how many writers and editors** you need
- How to avoid common mistakes in managing enterprise web site projects using the **S.I.M.P.L.E.**© **enterprise web content methodology** created by Write2Market, the company behind successful Fortune 500 enterprise content projects
- Why Vignette, Interwoven and other CMS systems aren't foolproof—and how you can **minimize your risks** when using them
- Strategies for proactively managing scope creep and **stakeholder concerns**

CONTENTS

Introduction

Why outstanding web copy matters

If you're reading this paper, you've probably just embarked on a web site redesign project, and you've given some thought to the copy. Congratulations—today, strong content is a distinguisher that Forrester and other analysts recognize as one of the most effective ways you can differentiate your brand online and **drive business success.** (Bradner 2008)

Even for the most diligent interactive leaders,enterprise web content projects, with their spiderwebs of code and content, are also fraught with issues, as evidenced by this embarrassing example of poor content management by American Express:

Figure 1 - Figure 1 - American Express With A CMS Character Mistake In The Promotion Line – or are they questioning the cardholder's approval?

With today's powerhouse design programs, imagery is easier than ever—but great content is still a mystery to most. Copywriting, because of its original and precise nature, cannot scale the same way many other forms of content do—such as product images, logos or video.

And with **search engine optimization** such a driving factor today, it pays directly in the performance of your site to write precisely what you need to communicate. This paper covers a proven management approach to **enterprise content management** (ECM) projects that is not based on any particular software. If you've chosen your CMS or are using something home grown, this approach will still help you sleep tight.

It's S.I.M.P.L.E.©

1) **S**cope the work

2) Inventory what you already have

3) Make an outline of the new, high level site architecture

4) Plan your writing assignments using a 3 writer: 1 editor scale

5) Lead the team to success with clear creative direction

6) Empower yourself to manage the process

This white paper will give you detailed tactics for each step, but first, some of you may be wondering why **we recommend using a new paradigm** at all. (If you aren't curious, skip the next section and go straight to the meat.)

Why enterprise web copy demands a new content management paradigm

One third of Fortune 500 firms just like yours are embarking on a web site redesign project in any given year—and most of the team members on a truly large enterprise web content project are often first-timers on a project of such scale. (Gasp.)

From a written content perspective, an enterprise-scaled site is fundamentally different from a "new web site" or a "web site refresh" project. While this paper can benefit anyone with a large web site project to complete, it's written particularly for the upper mid market or large-scale concern because enterprise-scale projects have unique concerns around **people and processes:**

> High-cost, resource-intensive Web content management (WCM) projects leave many organizations dissatisfied. While poor technology selection contributes to the frustration, the biggest problems afflicting WCM projects result from people and process issues. Through interviews with IT managers and marketing professionals in enterprises, as well as vendors and third-party consultants, Forrester identified three best practices in external Web site WCM adoption:
> - Enterprises that kept stakeholders engaged throughout implementations,
> - used pilots strategically, and
> - simplified functionality where possible
>
> launched sooner, found greater acceptance, and expressed greater satisfaction with their WCM initiatives. (Stephen Powers 2009)

Facilitating the interactive display of thousands of products, perhaps in multiple languages, defines the enterprise-scale web site—and that is the focus of this paper.

- For a straightforward how-to guide on copywriting for web sites of less than 100 pages, please review our white paper on "How to write for the web," available as a free download at www.write2market.com.

Hallmarks of enterprise web projects

Enterprise web content projects have certain hallmarks. They are:

- ✓ Hundreds of pages in scope—minimum approximately 300 pages, and many ranging into the thousands
- ✓ Built to be served dynamically—pages are created from a database (not a graphic program)
- ✓ Capable of serving the needs of several audiences

✓ Central to the marketing and sales success of the organization
✓ Use some form of content management to coordinate the effort and organize content

Step 1: Scoping

In the S.I.M.P.L.E.© methodology developed by Write2Market to keep interactive directors SANE, the first step in your web content project is scoping. Before anyone can even think about scope and scale, though, the first question that often pops to the mind of these tech-savvy marketers is, which software system am I using? Okay, let's get that one out of the way.

Which CMS should I rely on?

Given the sheer scale and scope of content for an enterprise site, it's obvious why most companies rely on content management systems—and in fact the new project is often an impetus for investing in a new CMS. (Do I have your attention now?) Unfortunately, even the "giants" of enterprise web copy often fall flat on their face when faced with copy integration, as evidenced by the following screen shot, taken February 25, 2008, from the web site of the web content management system chosen by Sun, Cathay Pacific, Motorola, and Hewlett Packard:
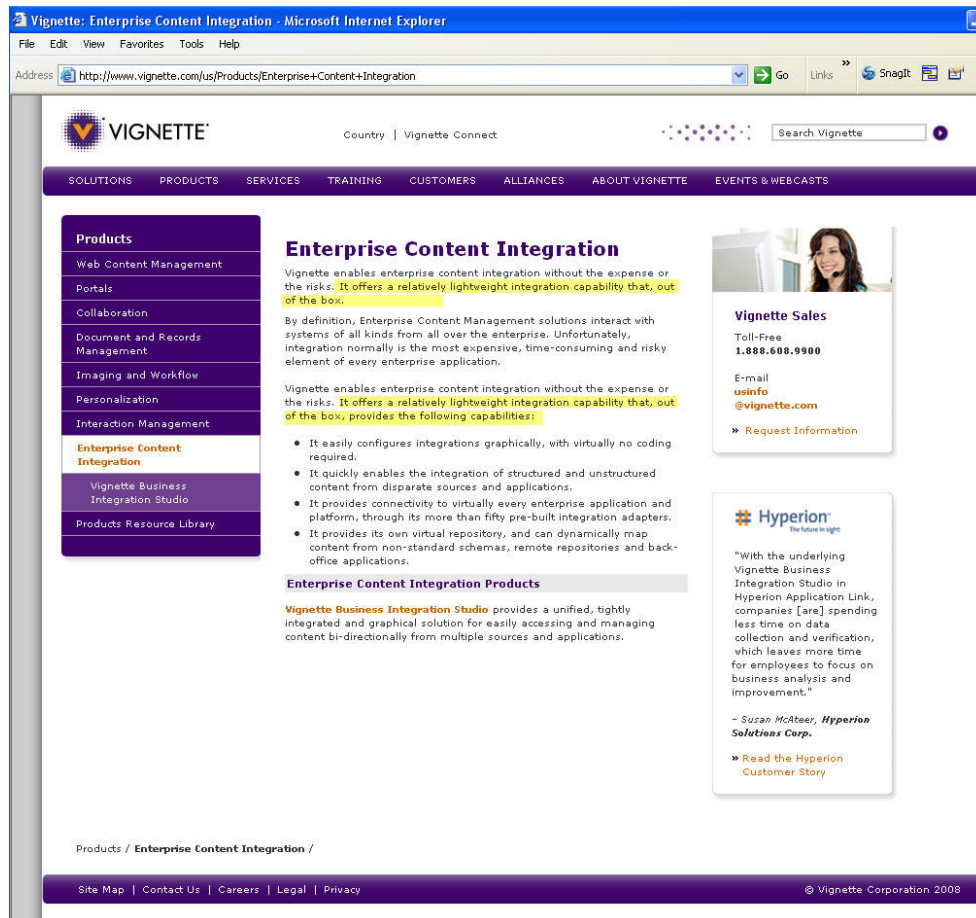

Figure 2 - Feb 25, 2008 - Vignette on content integration, demonstrating a content integration issue

Content management systems like Vignette and Interwoven—or your own home grown system—are powerful, but they won't write the copy for you, which is why you need a foolproof, organized plan and approach to your web copywriting before you involve the CMS as a repository.

> Every dollar spent on enterprise content management (ECM) software usually requires another dollar to make it work. (Craig Leclair 2008)

If a company as thoroughly versed in enterprise content as Vignette, a firm that big firms turn to, posts sentences that don't finish and then start somewhere else, we know that:

- This isn't easy
- This is still new enough that even reliable, well meaning firms have trouble, and
- As the doctor says before pulling back the sheet, now may be a good time to relax …

That's where Write2Market's experience with writing copy for enterprise website redesign projects comes in.

In this paper, we share a variety of experiences, metrics, and approaches to save you the time, and the trouble, of learning on your own. Since most web site redesign projects only occur once every three years (even for experienced marketing directors and managers) this is the first time many have encountered a mass of design and copy online and needed to "retool" it to something more in alignment with the company's latest thinking, branding and strategic direction.

This paper will help you discover what we've learned through writing thousands of pages of strong copy, clear calls to action, and messages that are on brand for major organizations like yours.

Managing scope creep

Like all major projects, web site redesign projects grow. As you do your best-guess-estimate of all the work involved, multiply it by three for a margin of safety in budget and resource allocation.

That may seem extreme, but the fact is, as these projects get underway, often more departments become involved than you originally scoped—and generally for very good reasons, as the web site is (or should be) fundamental to the organization's business process.

- ✓ **The better a job you do evangelizing how successful your project well be, the more people will want to get onboard.**

The converse is also true, unfortunately.

- ✓ **The more mired down the project becomes, the more people will be demanding updates or wanting status reports.**

If you buffer or triple estimates, you'll be able to take on the additional bandwidth. This is why smart interactive project directors **outsource substantial areas** of the project's development—the hands on work of creating graphics, pages, code, and copy—so that they can have the ability to manage the process and the direction.

9 departments to involve early in scoping

Here are some groups that often get involved after the project is launched. You may want to proactively socialize the project with these groups during scoping to mutually set guidelines and parameters of engagement:

1. **IT or technology** (if the project begins in the marketing department)
2. **Marketing/Sales** (if the project begins in the technology department)
3. **HR** (because the site is a recruitment tool
4. **Benefits** (because the site makes some claims about employees)
5. **Legal** (because of the claims the site makes about service or product guarantees)
6. **Finance** (because of the financial commitment for the site, and the need to justify the expense, in addition to concerns if there's an online sales component)
7. **Public relations** (launching a new site with new features is often a spring board for winning award campaigns or media outreach)
8. **Customer relations** (launching a new site gives them new opportunities to streamline and automate)
9. **Shipping and receiving** (if your shipping department packs product for your firm and there's an online sales component, they'll want tight integration)

Getting a handle on size of your report structure

Formally or informally, for each department that gets involved, **a separate communications trail with them is established.** Each group is a stakeholder with specific and individual concerns touching your web site redesign project. Your goal is to proactively manage as much of this as possible.

Step 2: Inventorying current assets

Your current web site has a variety of assets you may consider using in your revitalized site. Even if you HATE the current site, it's somebody's baby, and doing the due diligence of inventorying it will help your project succeed and stay socialized within the ecology of your organization.

- Assign a team to inventory the current site and create repositories for certain kinds of reusable resources.

There are three categories of property you'll want to have organized and available to your team:

Structured or unstructured content?

For those of you new to the debate, the structured content approach is where an organization breaks up its messaging into meaningful chunks. Brochures, catalogs, web copy and frankly, almost everything, can be created by assemblage.

In a structured content setting, clear field definitions are more important than ever.

Many firms feel they provide clear field definitions if they describe the field and its character length alongside a few hundred pages of "no-no's" from the Brand Style Guide. That won't work well for expert writers, who by nature tend to reason inductively (from the single example to the broad generalization) rather than deductively (broad rules to the specific applications). For writers, you need to provide the rules so they feel informed, but even more importantly, provide concrete examples so they can use the creative side of their mind to "intuit" what you need. A few strong examples are better than pages of guidelines for your writing team.

Catalog tools, copy and images

The three main categories of assets you can re-use are:

1) Tools. These snippets of functional code do specific things— like locate your distributors on a map, login to your Intranet, or export your newsletter.
2) Copy. Depending on the way your existing site was created, you may have swaths of content that are reusable, like tables full of current product descriptions, executive bios, and news archives.
3) Imagery. Many sites have an investment in photography or illustrate that is portable into the new site schema. Make a folder (or set of folders) with these images clearly organized, such as product icons, executive head shots, and the like.

Then keep, refresh, or discard

It's handy to keep in mind there are only three possible outcomes for any bit of content on your current site. It's either going to be:

- **Kept.**
- **Discarded.**
- **Edited or modified.** Even the slightest edit—dates, say, or headquarters locations—puts it on the copywriting pile.

Step 3: Making the outline

You have your stake holders and you have your vision. Next, you need to create a **high level architecture** for the site—clumps of information and function.

At this point, you don't need to go to the detail level of user paths or even detailed requirement gathering. Keep it high level so you can begin to assign resources.

While you're creating a high level architecture, keep in mind that for many of us, the first web sites we designed for companies were created **page by page**. Each page was crafted, and the distinction of "data," "code" and "creative" was clear. With today's dynamically driven sites, the distinction between code and copy can seem blurred. Is that bullet list written by the writer? Is it coming from the database? Is it perhaps coming from the database, AND it is written by creatives?

One of the reasons this issue is important to the project is that if something is written by a web copywriter, it needs to be managed,

assigned, and proofed. Determining which part of the web site is assigned to writers, and which parts are assigned to the database designer, is one of the first tasks of managing the written content of your site. The reason this even gets confusing is because in designing the database of a site, the names of fields can read very much like bullet points—especially for product-driven companies. Many a web project director has gone down the wrong road deciding that "table column head names" will do, when later they find out that those cells are limited to some arbitrary character count and can't handle the company's expanding hierarchy of services.

To make sure you avoid this issue:
- Complete the data architecture and data migration projects for the site **before you finalize the copywriting component.**
- Even if some data tables appear redundant, make sure your column heading data and row data are distinct.
- In your project plan, as the data architecture and data migration components of the project are finalized, have the writing tasks come to an end just after. That way, any components of the site not foreseen in the data architecture and not addressed by the database can be assigned to the writing team while the team is still fully staffed.

The data structure of the site will actually answer many of the questions about which content needs to be written, too, so as it is confirmed, your emerging picture of what needs to be written will clarify.

Step 5: Planning assignments

At this point, you know your creative direction and you know what assets you already have at hand. It's time to look at the gaps between the team available to you on site and their current workload, and the deadline your stakeholders have in mind.

Stakeholders with skin in the game

For example, roughly estimate how big your technology department is—and how many resources they can dedicate to the project. Do the same for your marketing and public relations team. Ask them directly and then document their answers when you come to them with, "how much time can you commit to the web site redesign in the next 30 days, 90 days, and 6 months?"

For copywriting, design, and web development, once you know what you have in house, you can begin to shop around for the right talent to flesh out your team. Large companies tend to hire interactive agencies, but in today's current climate of tight budget management, you may get a bigger bang for your buck by orchestrating teams the way an agency would, which means coordinating the project timeline for design, content and development yourself, and managing those teams more directly. That means you'll want to hire:
- A graphic design firm that specializes in web design or a web design firm
- A development team that can handle technical integration
- A copywriting or content development team

- An SEO firm

Some firms have all resources in house—the copywriting component is probably the most eclectic. At the time of this writing, only a handful of firms like Write2Market actually **specialize in written content development** in an enterprise environment. Many interactive agencies or design firms rely on you—the client—to be prepared with copy. The same is true with many SEO firms—they may be willing to put together a slate of keyword ads and sponsored placement pieces, but they often do not want to write the copy it takes to rank organically in search engines.

Thumb rules for writing you can rely on

In the specific case of web copywriting, the topic of this paper, in the thousands of pages of content we've created for companies, we find that the average professional web copywriter can belt out ten pages a day of expert, engaging copy. A powerhouse proofreader can comment 20-30 pages. That means for every three writers, you'll need one full time copy proofer. Some things you can do to achieve maximum copy through-put on large projects:

- **Group assignments around subject matter** so that pods of writers and editors can grow expertise in a particular area
- Have all editors **share an editorial guideline document** with common mistakes and usage facilities particular to your firm. We find the best forum for this is actually a wiki—so that editors can update a wiki themselves when they get clarification on points of concern. With a wiki, the new information is readily available to the whole team.

Step 4: Leading with creative direction

Seems impossible, but in fact, explaining the **meaning and goals** of your site to your team can be one of the hardest parts of a successful project, especially for the creative teams working on your content. In practice, brand design guidelines —and we've worked with some of the best—only manage the technicalities of expressing your brand online. They're so complex that at the level of the individual writer or the designer, they are simply out of scope—too big to internalize. So what do you do?

The "painted picture" methodology

One of the best methods we've used to keep everyone on the same page—literally—is the "painted picture." (Cameron Herold 2008) The person responsible for the outcome—the results—of the project takes a couple of hours, alone—without phones and internet—and writes down or verbalizes what the site needs to accomplish, and for whom. This is an emotional piece, filled with as many details as possible, and written in a conversational style. Here are some starters for paragraphs we've found helpful:

> *This website will be really important to _____because _____.*
> *For the first time, it will allow _____.*
> *The people who use it are _____.*

When they're on it, they feel_____.

Our business is transformed because of the site. For example:

I imagine our first visitor. Let's call her Linda. Her problem is_____. And when she finds this site by _____, she then _____ and the result is, within moments, _____. (Cameron Herold 2008)

The painted picture is also useful for communicating with your stakeholders, and for simplifying conversations regarding how the site will function.

4 ways to maximize writers' efficiency

The motto "out of the many, one" or "e pluribus unum" has been a goal that many the great team has striven for. It is even on the official seal of the United States. You can create **one voice** from a team of many writers if you follow these four careful practices, which have been developed at Write2Market as we create content for dozens of sites across the country—and across the brand/voice spectrum.

1) Develop **sample docs** ahead of time. Don't underestimate (or fail to use) the talents of an expert writing team. They can write like anyone you need them to write like, if you give them enough sample material. Before you send the bulk of your content development and web copywriting project to the team, develop 2-3 pages of sample material in the tone and style you want the whole site written in. That way, thousands of pages can be coordinated through the talent and ability of writers who get voice. It's just like providing sample designs or photos to artists—you constrain the style.

2) Place a priority on creating a **design template** for every type of page your web site delivers.

3) Use **design templates** to assign work to writers—that way, one writer can address a number of different content blocks.

4) Consider having a custom **database interface** for the writing team, so that although they write "in context" on a page template, the actual words they write are translated into the database or content management system field by field. For example, for the page below from the Write2Market archives, the writer wrote an "industry solutions" page by template, but the data would be translated from the writer, through approvers, into the database into 9 fields.
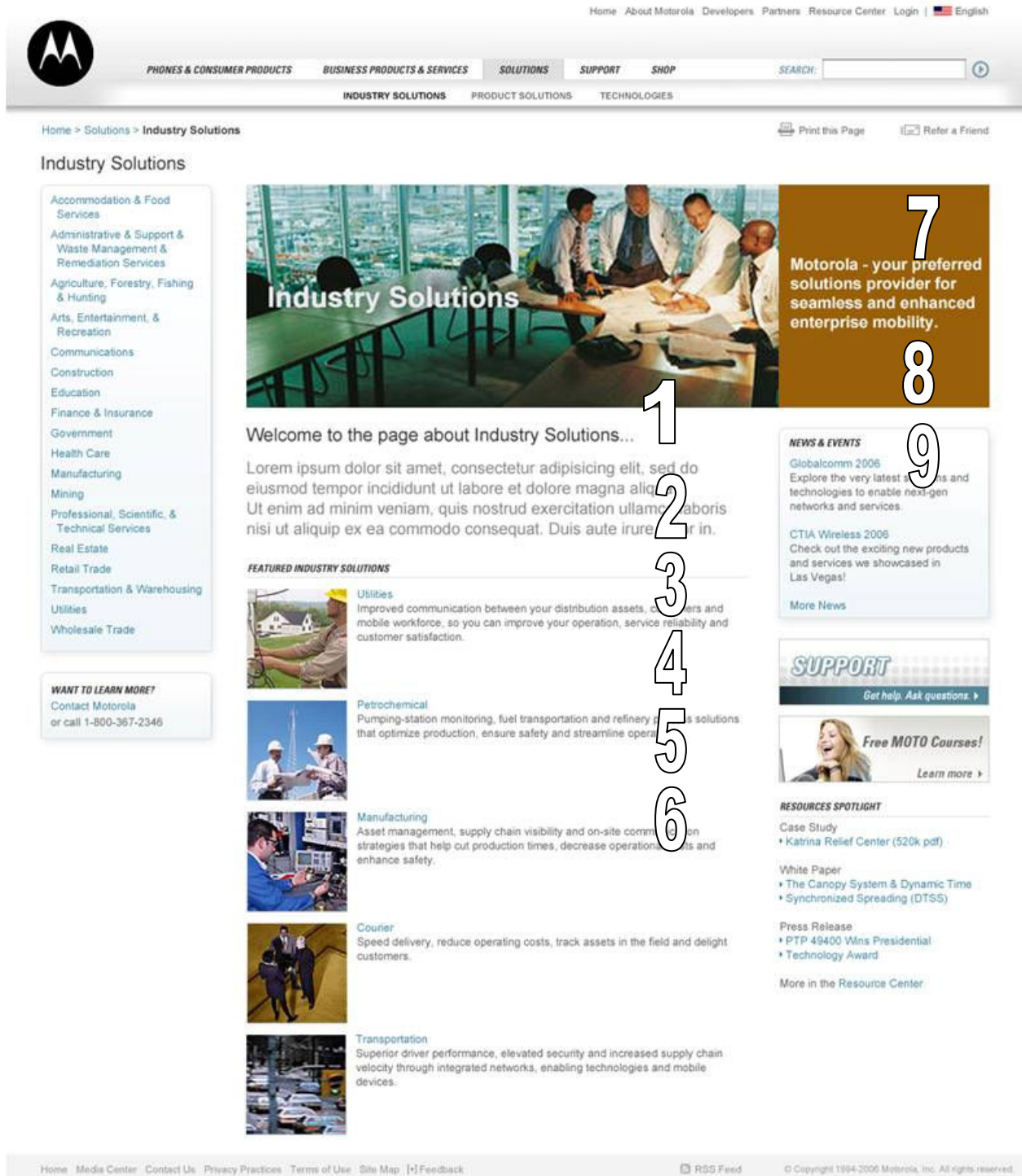
Figure 3 - Structured content in use at Motorola on a recent W2M project

Step 6: Empowering yourself to manage

6 real world strategies for orchestrating enterprise operations and communications

Managing stakeholder expectations from the outset will give your project the organizational lift it needs to succeed. Some ways the most successful web site redesign managers orchestrate expectations include:

1. Establishing a **regular meeting** to discuss progress and concerns with stakeholders. Members of this group can be recognized as the web site resign project direction board. Call it…monthly.

2. Establishing a **regular report** for each stakeholder group to apprise them on progress in areas they are concerned with. Call it…weekly.

3. Involving the stakeholders as a group in the **project plan** and timelines.

4. Involving stakeholders as a group in **defining responsibilities and penalties** for shirking responsibilities, such as lack of review privileges as the project moves forward.

5. Establishing **key deliverables** from each stakeholder—with alternate paths if the stakeholders do not deliver necessary material on time. (They key here is that a stakeholder loses oversight privileges if they fail to keep up with the project plan that they helped author!)

6. **Outsourcing** portions of the project that can reliably performed outside of the company, where there is some insulation from the back and forth of internal debate. You don't want your creative team worried about making the finance group happy.

Conclusions

Your enterprise web content project can and will go smoothly if you respect a few ground rules for the effort, which are, of course, S.I.M.P.L.E.©

1) Scope the work

2) Inventory what you already have

3) Make an outline of the new, high level site architecture

4) Plan your writing assignments using a 3 writer: 1 editor scale

5) Lead the team to success with clear creative direction

6) Empower yourself to manage the process

The fact is, it's **you** that has the unique role of managing the process. One of your most important tasks is making sure that YOU are free to do so. If you're like most interactive directors, you can write AND design AND code a bit. You're a one-person workhorse. That's why you have the Big Job.

But sincerely and seriously, the work you need to do is the hard work of making sure you have little to do but have conversations with team leads, and guide them to the end result. Your job is keeping the fire of vision fed with strong content, strong imagery, and strong code. If you falter—and start to write it yourself, lay it out, or integrate, the project will crater. Armed with the S.I.M.P.L.E. approach, we're

confident that can't happen, and the very fact that you read this paper means you're far ahead of the game and ready to play serious ball.

If you've gotten to this point in this white paper, we're practically comrades. If you'd like to talk to a Write2Market enterprise web content development expert about how we can help you manage the copywriting and content development portion of your site redesign, please call us. We love this kind of work, and whether or not you rely on us as your writing team on this particular project, we would love to speak with fellow professions involved in it. Call us any time at 404 419 6677 x 101.

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About Lisa Calhoun

Lisa Calhoun founded Write2Market, a full service content development company, in 2003. Before founding the agency, Lisa worked as a senior level marketing executive. In her career, she's helped Fortune 100 firms develop content at BBDO Worldwide, Ogilvy Mather, and other top global content development firms.

Lisa received her MBA from University of Texas and her BA in professional writing from Baylor University, summa cum laude on National Merit Scholarship. She enjoys vegetable gardening, weight training, cooking and hiking in her spare time. She makes her home in Atlanta.

About Write2Market

At Write2Market, we're passionate about delivering a *message that matters*--yours. Visionaries like you use our talent to powerfully connect with potential customers. Write2Market has pioneered using fewer words to reach more people. We focus online, where the **cost per qualified lead** is less than in other media.

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Write2Market
427 Moreland Ave NE Suite 600
Atlanta Georgia 30307
404-419-6677

www.write2market.com

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- How to Write a Brochure
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