```
<link href="/style.css" rel="stylesheet" type="text/css">
```

For an example of how powerful CSS is, take a look at the CSS house. A couple of the more popular resources on the web about cascading style sheets are the CSS Zen Garden and W3 school's CSS tutorial page. You may also want to view the official W3C CSS guidance page.

Effects of Change on Branding

On a daily, weekly, or monthly basis you can choose to change your font type, layout, colors…just about anything. You can do it in minutes and track the results. Some branding experts, however, such as Rob Frankel, believe that changing too frequently could hurt your brand.

Make sure you have a distinct idea of why and how you want to change before you start altering things. If you realize many things are completely broken, then a complete makeover might be in order, but typically it is best to change and test only one thing at a time so you know the **exact** effects of any change.

How CSS Saves Time

You can link each page of your site to an external style sheet to control the display. Many of the repetitive changes that would be made on every page can be done simply by changing one file. This may not seem like a big deal while creating page five or six, but if your site has 200 pages you will be glad that you used CSS!

CSS are not necessary for smaller sites, but are a great idea if you are building a large content-based site. They also can help to improve the content-to-code ratio.

Server Side Includes (SSI)

Server Side Includes is an Apache server technology that allows you to include pages or parts of a page within another page without the negative side effects of using a framed-based navigation system. To include another file inside of a page, include the following code where you want the included page to appear.

```
<!--#include virtual="/includedfile.htm" -->
```

The use of SSI for common elements, such as navigation or advertisements, work well to allow you to control your entire site by making simple changes to a single file. Between CSS and SSI, you can save literally hundreds or thousands of hours in your site design or re-design.

SSI also lets you include the date last modified or current date in the page. This is often how many of those generic one page sites have the current date in their sales letters.

On my Search Marketing Info site (Search-Marketing.info), I use SSI for the page footer, navigational tabs, local left column navigation, and right-side page ads.

> Using CSS and SSI or dynamic programming languages is not necessary if you aim to have a small Web site. If you are making a large site, these technologies can save you many hours in site maintenance.

You can learn more about SSI by viewing the Apache SSI Tutorial located at http://httpd.apache.org/docs/1.3/howto/ssi.html.

SSI Without Breaking File Paths

Webmasters often start out with a smaller site and later decide that they should start using SSI or a dynamic content management system. To use SSI, many people change their file paths from .html or .htm to .shtml or .shtm. The problem with doing this is that it can break inbound links. You can get around this by modifying your .htaccess file.

To learn more about .htaccess files, view the Comprehensive Guide to .htaccess at: http://www.wsabstract.com/howto/htaccess.shtml.

Content Management Systems (CMS)

Another technique to control the look and design of a site is to use a content management system. There are many dynamic languages people use such as PHP, ASP, and ColdFusion. However, most people do not need an expensive content management system. Before you invest heavily in a content management system or design, you should know what the goals of the website are. Make sure any content management system you would consider using produces search-engine-friendly pages. (More about making a site search engine friendly later.)

Blogs as Content Management Systems

> Writing an interesting blog ensures that you have fresh content available, which keeps traffic coming back to your site. In addition, blog software can be used as an exceptionally cheap content management system.

I organize many content sites with weblog programs such as WordPress and Movable Type. Movable Type costs $199 (as of writing this) for a commercial license and provides many of the features of expensive content management systems. Movable Type also offers a free one-month trial of their web-based software by the name of TypePad. If you like TypePad, you can host your blog there for a low monthly fee. Blogger, owned by Google, is a 100% free blogging software platform that is rather limited on the feature front. WordPress is free a downloadable software program that is easy to install.

If you want to give blogging a try, I suggest going to Blogger.com and signing up for a free account. If your site is personal in nature or you like the blog content management system, you may not even need to pay for design beyond a site logo. If you are serious about using a blog as part of a business, I would recommend using WordPress or Movable Type.

I wrote a couple articles on why I think using blog software is often an outstanding idea for both search engine placement and ease of site design. You can find them at http://www.search-marketing.info/newsletter/articles/articles.htm#blogs..

Professional Looking Design

It is worth it to pay someone to make a professional looking design for your site. It is very affordable easy to use a default blog template and pay a logo designer $50-

$200 to design a logo for you. My original SEO Book site design was not overly simplistic because I am a minimalist; it was overly simplistic because I am a bad designer. For the first two years it was a default Movable Type template with a $99 logo at the top. I eventually paid a few thousand dollars to get a new, crisp, clean design.

It is very easy to find shoddy logo design, but there are some good ones. Recently I purchased logos from The Logo Company for $150 each. A few times I have been disappointed, but some of their logos came out better than expected. My SEO Book logo was created by EZY Logo, a now defunct company that had great product but terrible customer support. If you need an exceptionally cheap logo you may want to run a contest at a forum or try to buy a logo from a site like Elance.

I purchased AAA logo design software for $50. I think it is fun to play with, but if you are not graphically inclined, you probably will want to pay someone else to design your logo. Buying a good original logo is an exceptionally cheap one-time investment.

Professional Looking Design (Part 2)

Making a site accessible, usable, and professional looking might cost you $10,000 or more. If you are low on funds, it might make more sense to spend that money on brand building and marketing, but if you want designers and the like to link at your site it is much easier to get links if your site looks professional.

Off the start I did not believe that coding errors or design mattered that much, but if you want technical sites to link to you, then your site has to pass the sniff test. That consideration is much more important if you write a tech blog than if you run a fairly static e-commerce site.

Copywriting

Humans do the Buying

Inevitably, it will be human eyes that see your web page. For example, if my first six chapters had no good advice, you would not read chapter seven.

I am unaware of any automated buying-bots that surf the web just to buy things. (There are, however, automated clicking agents that defraud people, and the people who create them should be shot.)

Copywriting Books

How do you write for human eyes? I recommend investing in a copywriting book. Some of the books I have read are *Net Words* by Nick Usborne, *The Online Copywriter's Handbook* by Bob Bly, and *Persuasive Online Copywriting* by Bryan Eisenberg. Of the three, I most highly recommend the third; *Persuasive Online*

When you create your pages, make sure they read well to people. You aren't writing them for robots.

You will need good copy to have a decent conversion rate and to encourage natural linking to your site.

Copywriting contains a ton of information packed into small convenient chapters, which works out well if you ever need to look at the information again.

Copywriting Bible

The above books are a great introduction to copywriting type books, but if you are looking for thorough copywriting and advertising advice, I could recommend no better book than *Tested Advertising Methods* by John Caples. It is like an encyclopedia of advertising knowledge from one of the world's best copywriters. It is a bit dated and speaks primarily of print ads, but if you are primarily writing sales copy, this is a great book to read.

The above books will also enlighten you with coverage of subjects such as the sales process and different personality types.

Horrible Copywriting

> We here at XYZ Corporation know what it means to be successful. In fact, sometimes we forget that at one point a long, long, long time ago we weren't the premiere information distribution technology enhancement resource agency facilitator. Times have changed though, and we have transfused our corporate mission to account for the discrepancies in the post-modern publishing phenomenon. We are…us…greatest…best…us, us, us…selfish, etc.

Basics of Online Copywriting

- Use varying style. Lose the corporate speak.
- Be yourself.
- Make it a conversation.
- Make your point up front.
- Don't use jargon.
- Use shorter text, or, as E.B. White would say, "omit needless words."
- Break up text using headers, sub headers, bulleted lists, and other text breaking devices.
- Stress benefits before features (unless it is a tech-heavy product).

An Audience of One

It is a great idea to sell information. If your copy can connect with a person and get them to feel as though they are working with a person instead of a screen, the sale process is much easier. You do not know who is on the other end of the computer.

People are generally distrusting toward the unknown. If site visitors sense a person is writing *just for them*, they will not want to click away.

Include a Call to Action

Many beautiful websites have no call to action. It is a great idea to guide the user. Some people use flashing text, **excessive red coloring or highlighting**, or other over-the-top techniques that distract the user away from what you want them to do.

Sales pages may want to play off of the emotions certain colors bring out, but with informational or general product pages, the focus should be on ease of use. I recommend avoiding using random misplaced bright colors on most web pages; instead, **make it obvious what action you want the user to take.**

The one exceptionally large blue button on the page…

APPLY NOW

The one that is centered inline in the content area…that's it, that's what I want you to do. Users should be able to do the action you want them to **without even thinking!** Both *The Big Red Fez by Seth Godin* and *Don't Make Me Think by Steve Krug* are books largely devoted to this simple concept.

Page Layout Error

Even if you keep the sales copy exactly the same, trying a slightly different page layout can result in a tremendous increase in profitability.

For example, when I first started the SEO Book site, I only promoted this e-book off to the side. I switched to promoting this e-book on every page right below the page content posts and overnight the sales more than tripled.

Another good example of how page layout can really make a difference in a web campaign is Howard Dean's presidential campaign. During Howard Dean's 2004 presidential campaign, they used their blog to cast a vote on whether or not their campaign should accept matching funds. After people voted, they were sent to a landing page. The first day saw 100,000 voters and raised **$248,000.**

They looked at the vote return landing page and noticed that the donate button was at the bottom of the page. They moved it to the top of the page. On the second day, another 100,000 people voted, but they raised **$4,500,000.**

Make it Flow

Small sentences and paragraphs with common words make writing flow easily. In addition, you can make the text easy on the eyes by setting a line height (the area of a line of text and the space above or below it) to at least 120% of the text height, and by using the maximum contrast between your text and background.

Since you have no sales person on your site, the text is the sales person. It needs to answer questions and arouse appeal toward your products.

Sell Upward

McDonald's asks, "would you like fries with that?" Most major corporations know it is easier to sell again to a person than it is to find a new prospect. After a person contacts you or orders something, send them to a thank you page.

Give them small free gifts, strengthen their bond with you, make them feel good about their decision, or try to sell them something else. It does not need to bring in money to be a gain. If they subscribe to your mailing list, you have increased your exposure FREE. Consider giving them options to read other journals that cross promote you.

Or, you could reference affiliated companies. These links can hold discounts that appear as gifts, when in actuality, they make you money. I recently purchased ink cartridges and got 5% off for adding their site to my favorites list. It is much cheaper to give me 5% off than to try to find me again later. The possibilities are endless.

Focus on the User

The user focus must be on benefits offered to them. Writing the word you instead of we is a must. The simpler and easier it is for users to see benefits from an action, the better off they are and the more conversions you make.

Some techies might like features, but to general audiences it is usually best to rank your priorities in the following manner:

1. Audience
2. Benefits
3. Features (if you are selling to a techie audience they may want the features before the benefits).

Make it a Conversation

All the above tips pale in comparison to the following tip:

- Write in a conversational tone, as a person, not a company.

Fake fluffery does not go well on the web. People can smell it a mile away. Since the Web started as a non-commercial entity, there are certain etiquettes (or *netiquettes*) that dictate how we should act. When we go outside these basic ideas, we not only avoid conversion, but also are likely to offend our readers.

Many of the people who have bought this e-book told me they bought it because I sounded honest and real. Some of my blog posts are somewhat random, personal, or humorous, and some people like that.

GapingVoid.com is a weblog (some might find offensive for cursing and being blunt), but it talks about creating smarter conversations, and I find his cartoons and copy refreshing for their bluntness.

You can get away without being the best copywriter if you are honest.

Rapid Feedback Loops

Blogs and websites such as Epinions and Planet Feedback make it easy for customers to see what others have to say about you. Google Groups, Yahoo! Groups, and MSN Groups are additional havens for complaints. A large portion of the value of the Amazon experience is user reviews and the "X people recommended blah instead of this" area. People have told me they have bought my book due to it being mentioned on book lists on Amazon.

Just be honest. If you are not the best, work to improve! Work from your strengths and focus on something you are the best at. You should also occasionally look and see what others have to say about your service by checking search results. If you solve problems and turn complainers into happy customers, you lower your marketing costs.

Customer interaction should be personal, not corporate-speak driven. Sometimes you will fall short (as I have many times), but honesty goes a long way. If you find your way into the conversation and are human about it, you curb the rants and may even spur on a few people who believe in you. An amazing book on how markets are conversations is called *The ClueTrain Manifesto* by Christopher Locke, Rick Levine, Doc Searls, David Weinberger (*ClueTrain* is available free online).

Quality Content

Lots of people will tell you to create lots of quality content without ever giving a legitimate definition of what quality content is. The web is a big social network, and the trick is to **get your messages to spread further and faster than your competitors.** Usually, creating more pages does not do this as well as creating a better idea.

The Web was designed to save people time or give away useful information. The closer you can align a portion of your business model or website with those concepts, the better chance you have at achieving extreme success.

While many SEOs hold back their secrets so they can profit from them, I give this e-book free to charities and post most of what I learn to my blog. I not only help people, but my syndicated network grows. I have been found by prospective customers from word-of-mouth in forums I have never heard of. One day I got a thank you e-mail from a person from a religious forum and about ten minutes later got a thank you from a person from a pornography forum.

What is Quality Content?