Writing News Stories for a Rotary Club Website - a curriculum

Session One – an Introductory Overview to writing journalistically on the web.

Understand the context within which the club website exists and within which you are writing for a website editor.

A Rotary club website exists in two very separate parts:

a. An internal private section for members only.
b. A public outward facing section for the public to see. It has two main purposes:
   - To recruit new members
   - To indirectly inform the community about Rotary and the community

The editor is the person who puts your story on a "Story Page". He/She understands design and layout – you have to write with the editors needs in mind. The editor is concerned with two intersecting audiences one real -the reader- one electronic – the algorithms built into Google.

A rule to break! Ideally a website should post at least one story a week but if there is no news to post then do not do a post.

How to know you have a news story that is newsworthy:

a. Anything is newsworthy that is local in nature, hasn't been done before, is unique, and is intended to leave an impact – that is why we do stories on our speakers talk.
b. If possible, arrange to interview the speaker (newsmaker) to draw out a quote or follow-up information or even to get their contact info in case a question arises.
c. Think about the one key message you want to get across – the uniqueness-how it is local-often this informs your headline.
d. Start constructing your main points in your head (take notes in a variety of ways-scribbled on piece of paper, as a recording on your phone, if there are slides do a screen grab so you have them to refer to.)
e. Write journalistically – (The topic of a full session) Short sentences, short paragraphs, short story.
f. Insert one or two quotations, if possible.
g. Add some research your competition likely will not have – the competition is now websites for CKDR and Q104 (Dryden Now), they will beat us in posting so we need a little extra.
h. Edit, edit, edit – read out loud to yourself, use Grammarly -free version to check for punctuation and spelling errors - use headline analyzer by Headline Studio by CoSchedule to gage emotional attractiveness of headline. Use Word to count your # of words –

Seven Writing Tips

1. Use a natural voice like when you talk; no big words, write short sentences.
2. Be conversational; be natural, do not lecture! Use 'you' to make it personal.
3. People do not read, they scan. A second is a long time on a web story. Break up the print with sub-headings, pull-quotes, bullet lists, crossheads, & side heads
4. Use words everyone understands, no Rotary jargon!

5. Add value –increase the readers knowledge through explanations and analysis.
6. Get straight to the point in first sentence/paragraph.
7. Say a lot in a few words – aim for 300 to 350 words, max out at 500, that is 2 screens.

Homework Exercise

 # 1 Provide in point form or audio form a typical Rotary speaker's story.

A) write a headline

Session Two – an Introduction to writing journalistically on the web.

A) Headline writing

Share and analyze participants draft headlines – have Headline Studio evaluate the headlines. Discuss findings – jointly write a headline to see if we can score higher.

5 Key features of Website news story headlines

1. Two key masters
2. The 70 character limit; the ideal length
3. The importance of a noun
4. Font size issue
5. What's of Value – News vs. Freshness

The Dos and Don'ts of Clickability

a. Do Use Words that increase clickability
   - four parts: common words, uncommon words, emotion words and power words.
   - Strive for clarity, what and why of a story
   - 5 questions to ask yourself when writing headlines
   - Use of a number in a headline.
   - Use of a sub-headline.

b. Do not use headlines as "clickbait".

B) Writing the Story

1. Use of the Inverted Pyramid
   a. The lead or introduction (sentence or short paragraph) focus on the five Ws and the H
   b. The body or middle
   c. The tail

2. Three Advantages of the Inverted Pyramid

Homework Excercise

Using the same material provided in exercise # one, write the body using the inverted pyramid technique with emphasis on

- write an opening sentence or two sentence paragraph
- the middle
- the tail .

Session Three – Analyze draft stories of participants from the perspective of a reader and of Google.

A) Evaluate the draft stories from a reader's view and Google's view

- Create a chart with criteria and a rating scale to extent that criteria was achieved for reader
  e.g. clarity of ideas

low				high
1	2	3	4	5

- Create a chart with criteria and a rating scale to extent that criteria was achieved for Google
  e.g. clarity of key words

low				high
1	2	3	4	5

B) Discuss the results and attempt to write a collective draft.

C) Understanding the role of the Website editor.

D) On-line resources for news story writers

Good Web-based writing sites

https://www.thoughtco.com/

https://help.medium.com/

https://www.examples.com/