

Trends in business communication

 By [Frances Gordon](#)

10 Jan 2012

In the past two years, many large companies have reshaped, restructured and rewritten their content - from print to web to mobile and SMS. The catalysts for these large and often expensive changes have been neither business imperatives nor technological innovations, but new laws.



The [Consumer Protection Act](#) (CPA) and similar laws and regulations ([Companies Act](#), [National Credit Act](#), [Treating Customers Fairly Roadmap](#), for example), are forcing companies to adopt a large-scale rethink of their content, mostly because of the new requirement for 'plain language'. The changes are often driven by compliance and legal departments, rather than marketers or professional communicators.

This new regime of laws that have a direct impact on business communication is the backdrop of my approach to predicting these six content trends (in this article, I use 'content' widely to refer not only to print, but also to web, mobile, SMS, call centre, and all other types of content):

1. Companies start getting strategic about content

Smart companies, or those that have learnt their lessons from rushed, unplanned rollouts, are realising that they need to think before they implement. They know that, if you don't have good editorial and other planning tools, trying to do many pieces of content at the same time is just a waste of time. It leads to massive inconsistencies, process bottle-necks and wasted resources.

[Content strategy](#) is the discipline they will turn to for help. There's so much being written about content strategy at the moment that it's impossible to keep up - and much of it is good, practical methodology. According to industry leaders [Brain Traffic](#), content strategy comprises four elements:

- Substance (what content is needed)
- Structure (how content is organised)
- Processes (both for launching and maintaining content)
- Workflow (governance)

Although content strategy is often centred on online content, there is no reason the methods and approaches cannot be applied to all channels and media. The good news is that there is a great opportunity to learn more about content strategy in 2012.

Thanks largely to the efforts of [Kerry-Anne Gilowey](#) ([@kerry_anne](#)) of Cape Town content strategy consultancy [August Sun](#), [Content Strategy Forum 2012](#) is coming to Cape Town. This content-strategy conference will bring international speakers and experts - and, I hope, will encourage SA organisations to apply this discipline to their own environments.

2. More content audits and better ones, too

While 2012 will see some SA companies doing their very first content audit, most companies will improve and extend their content audits.

Right now, SA content audits tend to focus on one channel (usually the web) or one issue (often, compliance with plain language requirements or usability). While this is far better than no audit at all, companies are realising that each piece of

content has multiple requirements and purposes, and it saves time and money to look at it all at the same time.

3. Responsive design for content

Designers and technology gurus are getting excited about responsive design. 2012 will see an exploration of the equivalent in content. Content repurposing is a field that always attracts controversy as it is very difficult to apply one strategy to different situations.

2012 will see more companies asking, "How can we be more efficient in using our content appropriately in other channels or media?" This will happen more and more in 2012, and will result in better use of content management systems and processes, and more consistent content.

4. Lawyers and marketers listen to each other

We will see more thoughtful and respectful conversations between marcomms and legal experts. Marcomm professionals have to start appreciating the legal intent of some documents, just as lawyers must start respecting the skill-sets that can help to make content useful and useable by ordinary South Africans.

5. Copywriters get to grips with the subject matter

Copywriters need to start understanding the detail so that they can ensure that their content is accurate and comprehensive, and does not hold any potential for misleading the consumer.

Eg, the user-friendly summary of your life insurance that you read on the web must be consistent with the wording in the policy. If 'insurance benefit' or 'investment value' is used in both a policy document and an advert, it must hold a consistent meaning.

6. A widening content divide

In short, in 2012 we will see an increasing divide between the companies that view content changes as a necessary evil and those companies that consider content to be a business asset.

The former will continue to pursue short-term approaches, in which they ask, "What is the least we can do to comply?" This unthinking approach must result in poor implementation - and increased cost in maintaining content across channels.

The latter will shift to a strategic view of content, and learn what they can from various disciplines, including plain language, usability, online publishing and digital strategy. They will then have the foundations for reaping the rewards: content that's cheaper and easier to produce and that makes a bottom-line difference.

For more:



Bizcommunity Special Section: [Biz Trends 2012](#) - sponsored by Aegis Media

Bizcommunity Search: [2012 trends](#)

Bizcommunity: [Biz Trends 2012 twitterfall](#)

Twitter Search: [#biztrends2012](#)

ABOUT FRANCES GORDON

Frances Gordon is a content strategist and plain language expert who consults to leading international and South African brands on print, web and mobile content. In 2005, she co-founded training and consultancy firm Simplified (www.simplified.co.za) in Johannesburg. In 2010, Frances sat on the Plain Language Association InterNational board and she's currently part of the International Plain Language Working Group. Tel +27 (0)11 483 3418, email Frances@simplified.co.za and follow [@Simplified_SA](#)

■ [2012 trends] Trends in business communication - 10 Jan 2012

■ How to get your docs ignored, misunderstood or misinterpreted - 29 Aug 2011

View my profile and articles...

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>