



Killer Web Content

Gerry McGovern - June 2008

Low fares or cheap flights?

Let's say you are thinking of flying somewhere. What would you search for?
A low fare or a cheap flight?

Research indicates that 400 times more people search using the words 'cheap flights' than 'low fares'. So, if you are selling economy fares, it is important that you use the term 'cheap flights' in your marketing and advertising campaign.

I remember telling this to a senior executive from a major airline. He shrugged, replying that there was no way his airline would use the words 'cheap flights' on its website. 'It would hurt the brand,' he told me. (Very sensitive things, these brands.) At the time of our conversation, this airline was in financial difficulties. No wonder. It had failed to recognize a key economic trend: customers' carewords now drive communication.

It takes time to stop thinking organization language and start thinking customer language. Successful cheap-flight airlines like Aer Lingus and Ryanair are recognizing that, on the Web, the customer controls the language.

Ryanair: The Low Fares Airline
Ryanair: Fly Cheaper

PREVIOUS
NOW



Aer Lingus: Low Fares. Way Better.
Aer Lingus: For the Cheapest Aer Lingus Fares

PREVIOUS
NOW



Both of these airlines have moved away from using 'low fares' to using the 'cheap' word. That is a very hard thing to do, as conventional wisdom would say that it's not very good branding to be seen as cheap. Well, it certainly hasn't harmed the Ryanair and Aer Lingus brands. And as for the airline I mentioned that refused to use the word 'cheap' on its website, last I heard it was being liquidated. (But the brand retained its dignity, of course.)

People share common carewords

When faced with a particular task, people all over the world use the same basic carewords. It is quite simply a myth that, if you put twenty people in a room and ask them to choose a set of twenty carewords, you'll get twenty totally different sets of answers. Certainly, there may be subtle yet important differences in certain careword choices, but there will be strong core commonalities. I put over 1000 people in rooms in 11 different countries to find the carewords of tourists in order to help an imaginary company called Great Irish Holidays achieve success.

Or should that be Great Irish *Vacations*? In Ireland, we say we are going on a summer holiday when we are going away for a week or two. In the United States, a holiday is an official break — Fourth of July, for example. If you're going on a longer break, you're on vacation. American tourists search for 'vacations' not for 'holidays'.

KILLER POINT: Find the common careword.

The consistency of choices from these 1000 people was amazing. I asked them to choose their favorite ten carewords from a set of 136 careword options. Over 45% chose the same top ten carewords. The bottom seventy potential carewords were chosen by less than 3% of the people. Whether you are in Boston, Belfast, Brussels, or Brisbane, there are certain carewords you use when thinking about going on a holiday/vacation.

The top fifteen carewords chosen were:

1. Accommodation
2. Special offers
3. Planning a trip
4. About Ireland
5. Getting here and around
6. Things to do and see
7. Deals
8. What to see and do
9. Book travel
10. Home
11. Irish vacation packages
12. Best of Ireland
13. Contact us
14. Travel bookings
15. About us



The above carewords define the common tasks for the Great Irish Holidays website. (There are, of course, some similar/duplicate carewords in the above list, and I will examine how we deal with these later on in the chapter.) These carewords tell us what the tourist requires.

- They want a place to sleep.
- They want special offers/deals.
- They'd like the option of a package where everything is looked after for them.
- They want a 'Best of Ireland' list, and a list of interesting things to do and see.
- They want to know about Great Irish Holidays and whether it is a company they can trust.
- They want to be able to contact Great Irish Holidays easily.

The implications of these carewords are substantial. It takes a specific type of company and a lot of work to put together special offers/deals and packages, for example. These carewords are highly strategic. Should they be adopted by Great Irish Holidays, they will come to represent — in the smallest number of words — exactly what the company does.

Your carewords are NOT your customer's carewords

Again and again, I have found that the carewords of the organization are not those of the customer. Take Irish tourism for example. Most tourists see Ireland as a single destination. However, the Irish tourism industry sees Ireland in a very localized way. A hotel owner is only interested in promoting his hotel in his local area, for example.

The case is similar with bodies set up to promote Irish tourism. There is some attempt to promote Ireland as a single destination, but there are many bodies — both official and voluntary — that focus on promoting their particular geographic area or interests. Here are just some of the official bodies responsible for Irish tourism: Tourism Ireland, Fáilte Ireland, Northern Ireland Tourist Board, Shannon Region Tourism, Dublin Tourism, Ireland West Tourism, and South East Tourism. To some extent at least, each of these bodies sees itself in competition with the others.

Part of the tourism careword set for Great Irish Holidays included a list of geographical names. The following table shows how these names scored compared with the top fifteen carewords that people chose.



Customer Carewords	Score	Tourism Body Carewords	Score
Accommodation	2479	Dublin	263
Special offers	2373	Regions	160
Planning a trip	1375	Southeast	26
About Ireland	1234	West	22
Getting here and around	1146	Northwest	15
Things to do and see	1084	Northern Ireland	10
Deals	1052	32 Counties	8
What to see and do	1032	Midlands East	0
Book Travel	977	Shannon	0
Home	885	Southwest	0
Irish vacation packages	829		
Best of Ireland	793		
Contact us	741		
Travel bookings	707		
About us	557		

From the 1000 people in eleven different countries who chose tourism carewords, hardly anyone voted for geographical words. Only ‘Dublin’ received a significant score of 263 (out of 30,612 votes cast), but this pales in comparison with the most popular careword — ‘accommodation’ — which received 2479. This is not to say that geography is irrelevant to the tourist. However, when they come to a tourism home page, other things — such as accommodation, special offers, packages, etc. — are obviously more important.

Irish tourism websites tend to stress regions first. This is a perfectly natural thing to do — if you’re a tourism official working in the southeast of Ireland, you get paid by South East Tourism. It’s hard to grasp that you ultimately get paid by the tourists, and, if you don’t serve their needs, they are less likely to visit. So, by emphasizing its organizational structure on the Web, rather than what the tourist wants, Irish tourism is creating a big problem for itself — one that is relevant to most organizations.

Some time ago, I did a careword exercise with a government department of education. I asked the staff to select what they thought were the most important carewords that should appear on the home page of the department’s website. Their choices were to be influenced by the target readers they had identified, who were parents and teachers. Here’s what they came up with:

1. Public consultations
2. Reports and publications
3. News and information
4. Schools
5. Policy



We then went out and asked teachers and parents to do the same. Here's what teachers chose as their top five.

1. Teachers
2. Curriculum, syllabus, and teaching guides
3. Subjects
4. Teacher lesson plans
5. Curriculum

Here's what parents chose.

1. Curriculum, syllabus, and teaching guides
2. Supporting my child
3. Exams general information
4. Protecting my child
5. School search

While there is some correlation between the carewords of teachers and parents, there is no correlation between what Department staff thought should be on the homepage of the website, and what their two core target markets would like to see. Civil servants care about things like 'policy' and 'reports and publications,' while teachers care about 'teachers' and 'teacher lesson plans,' and parents care about 'supporting' and 'protecting' their children.

So please, please don't fall into the trap of thinking that what you care about as an organization is what your customer cares about. Think of Mary, Jennifer, Tomas, and Johan every day. Get your reader personas totally integrated into your work practices so that you will be speaking their language, not yours.