



By

Trista Meehan

Last week, [Jeff Alpen](#), Blink's Client Engagement guru, asked me if I could quickly pull together some existing research for one of our clients. He posed a question to me that pops up again and again in discussions about customer experience:

How much are people reading online?

My short answer: Very little.

Ironically, the evidence is voluminous. From well-known usability experts—such as Steve Krug and Jakob Nielsen—to scientists who study the evolution of the human brain, everyone seems to agree that we now consume information **very** differently than we did even 10 years ago. Quite often that consumption involves very little reading.

Why aren't people reading online?

People who consume information regularly on the Internet have adapted to nonlinear reading. According to an [article by the Washington Post](#), neuroscientists say we're developing "digital brains with new circuits for skimming through the torrent of information online." The downside: our highly adaptive brains [can't stay focused for very long](#).

There are some exceptions, however. According to Steve Krug, author of *Don't Make Me Think*, [sometimes people do read](#) if they

- Find exactly what they're looking for
- Are reading for pleasure
- Tend to be methodical readers, in general (rarer, in my experience)

But I would add one more to this list. Users transition from skimming to reading if they stumble on something that particularly interests them, whether or not they were intending to conduct research, per se. News articles and blog posts (particularly those that relate to [current events](#) or trends, how-to's/tutorials, product reviews, etc.) are two written content types that encourage more focused reading.

So, if they're (mostly) not reading, how ARE people interacting with online content?

They're busy...

- *Skimming & scanning* to find relevant and/or interesting information.
- *Clicking* links or buttons that appeal to them.
- *Looking* at graphics/pictures that tell a story (real people, infographics).
- *Watching* videos, but usually not for more than one-to-three minutes, generally.
- *Sharing/Commenting*, but it doesn't mean they've consumed that content.
- *Listening* to music and podcasts.
- *Avoiding* anything that looks (or reads) like an ad.

Specifically, online **video watching** has increased significantly in the past several years, corresponding with an increase in mobile device usage. According to the Global Web Index, 77% of Internet users are watching video clips; 26% are watching branded videos.

Dr. Susan Weinschenk—aka, "the brain lady"—[explains why video is so compelling](#):

- Our brain is hard-wired to pay attention to faces.
- Voice conveys rich information.
- Emotions are contagious.
- Movement grabs attention.

While the often-quoted “One minute of video is worth 1.8 million words” [simply isn’t true](#), many companies recognize the significant power of this medium, and are investing heavily in video content for both B2C and B2B markets.

So how does this impact content strategy?

When planning or revising online content, keep these 5 tips in mind:

1. Uncover the needs of your audience through research.

Find out what your audience needs, then provide the *right content* in the *preferred format*. Find ways to personalize content, and provide opportunities for users to prioritize the content they value most.

2. Keep written content short, simple, and scannable.

Users are more likely to read content that appears valuable and is well structured. Provide links to supplementary info for folks who want to dive deeper into the topic.

3. Display meaningful imagery, not stock photography.

Users want pictures (especially “real” human faces) and graphics (such as engaging infographics) that convey data or add support to the story.

4. Invest in quality video/audio content.

Video content should be entertaining and/or helpful. Also, it should be short; users often stop watching after a few minutes, and shorter videos are more likely to be shared.

5. Conduct feedback or usability sessions.

It’s important to make sure users can quickly find important content and find out how they feel about the type and quality of the content, overall.

For Further Reading:

- [How People Read Online \(Infographic\)](#)
CMS Wire
- [Serious reading takes a hit from online scanning and skimming, researchers say](#)
The Washington Post
- [55% of Visitors Spend Fewer Than 15 Seconds on Your Website.](#)
Ginny Soskey
- [How We Really Use the Web](#)
Steve Krug, “Don’t Make Me Think”
- [How Little Do Users Read?](#)
Jakob Nielsen
- [You Won’t Finish This Article](#)
Slate
- [4 Reasons Online Video is Compelling and Persuasive](#)
Dr. Susan Weinschenk
- [22 Video and Online Marketing Statistics You Need to Know in 2015](#)
Talking Head Studio

00bbdd