WRITING FOR THE WEB

If you Google "writing for the web" you will come up with hundreds of thousands of links to advice (of varying degrees of quality) for this most contemporary of writing styles. That's because there is a great deal to consider when putting words online.

While, at one level, good writing is good writing no matter where it appears, writing for the web differs from more traditional forms of writing in three main ways:

1. The physical/visual experience of reading text on a screen vs. paper (generally, the eye comfortably absorbs much less on screen).

2. The generational differences of web surfers (younger people today having grown up in a web-based, more visually-oriented, instant-information, "sound bite" culture).

3. How and to whom the information is disseminated and the related issues of privacy, copyright, age-appropriateness, etc. (In other words, if it's online, it's mostly there for the world to see).

The first two issues are worth giving some thought to if your organization or team will be creating exhibits, or building a website, on Maine Memory. The exhibit and site templates built into the MMN tools are designed to take into account web aesthetics—pre-set margins, for example, will insure plenty of white space around the edges of the screen. But there are other formatting choices you'll need to make and you should keep these issues in mind as you do.

As the writers and exhibit builders in your organization or on your team begin their work, discuss and share your own experiences with websites. Which ones do you enjoy reading and why? Which ones do you consider poorly-designed or badly written? Take some time to look at examples.

An excellent resource is the following column from the journal *History News*, Autumn, 2008, which cleverly uses the terms "bite, snack, and meal" to explain how information should be presented on a

website. Read this and discuss how it applies to the information you plan to convey in your exhibit or on your own website:

http://www.ctculture.org/chc/program_resources/hrc/2009/07/writing-for-the-web.html.

MORE INFORMATION

Visit the Share YOUR Local History section of the Maine Memory Network website, www.MaineMemory.net.