

Content strategy for services: a playbook

Some things that
have worked in
the past

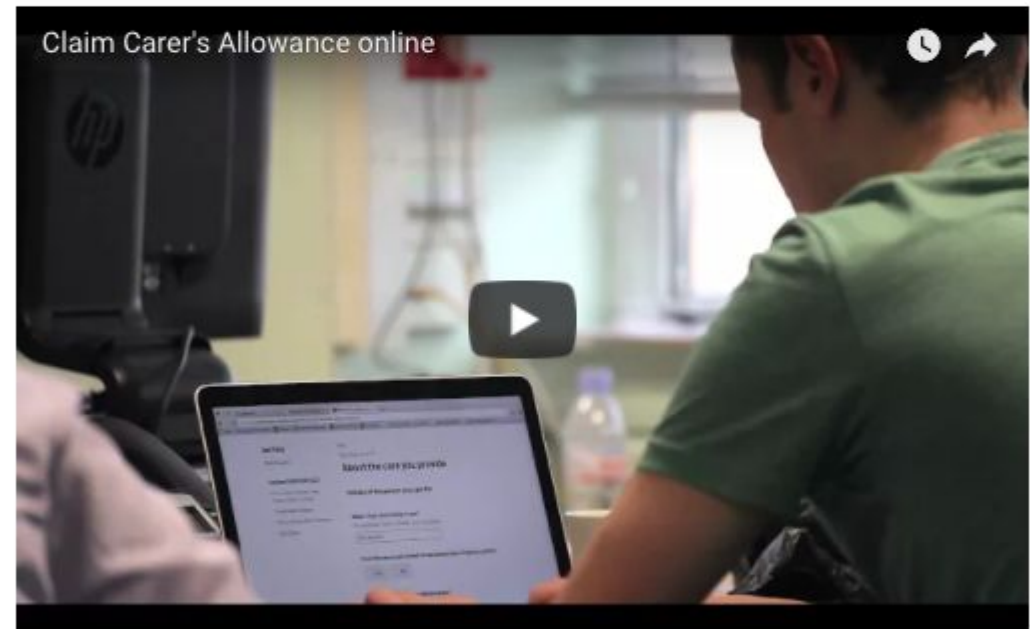
Strategy: over time,
make simplicity the
defining metric of
success for your
organisation

For example,
frame
progress in
terms of the
number of
questions
you're
removing from
a form

Simpler Carer's Allowance digital service now live

Steve Wood, 28 November 2014 - Transformation

The [new Carer's Allowance digital service](#) goes live today. If you have access to the internet it's now easier than ever to apply for Carer's Allowance. Here's a short film we've made about the service:



As you can see, the Carer's Allowance team in Preston has done much more than digitise the paper application form. By doing user research, and diving into the detail of the application process, the team has been able to remove 170 questions from the application process – that's 49% of the questions.

How to make the case for simplicity

1. Complexity costs users time and money

Background

There is a large amount of guidance on environmental regulation, with our mapping exercise finding around 6,000 documents covering more than 100,000 pages. The information relevant to any single business is often contained in several dozen overlapping documents issued by different organisations, in different formats and styles, making it very difficult and time consuming to find out what they need to do to comply. It is particularly

Source:

<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20150423095755/https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/smarter-environmental-regulation-review-phase-1-report-guidance-and-information-obligations>

2. Complexity costs government time and money

Some services have to reject 75%
of applications

Source: <https://mojdigital.blog.gov.uk/2015/07/29/helping-people-with-court-fees/>

Public services spend
up to 70% of effort
dealing with failure
demand

- *The Whitehall Effect*

3. Complexity stops people accessing vital services

Government to overhaul benefits sanctions process

Independent report shows systematic failings in the way benefit sanctions are communicated and processed

0 197

This article is 2 years old

Patrick Wintour
Tuesday 22 July 2014 20.54 BST

The government is to overhaul the way it treats benefit recipients threatened by sanctions, after an independent report it commissioned showed systematic failings in the process, including disproportionate burdens placed on the most vulnerable.

The report found that the way in which the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) communicated with claimants was legalistic, unclear and confusing. The most vulnerable claimants were often left at a loss as to why their benefits were stopped and frequently they were not informed about hardship payments to which they were entitled, the report said.

4. Complexity erodes trust in government

Fifty years ago, if an average citizen was faced with complexity... they said: “I must be stupid. I trust you—the expert—to help me and to do the right thing.”

Today, they are more likely to say: “You must be stupid if you expect me to fall for this jargon, spin and propaganda. I don’t trust you.”

- Gerry McGovern

Tactics: persistence

For every
question,
keep asking
why it's there

Acceptable answers:

1. We need that question for matching or authentication
2. The question helps quality of responses **more than it hurts**
3. It's a legal requirement (ask for a link to the legislation - there are often misconceptions about this)

Tactics: form design

1. Remove the words

Before

Civil Penalties

What is a civil penalty?

A civil penalty is a fine for breaking the law. There may be circumstances when a civil penalty may be imposed if a person fails to comply with electoral regulations on registering to vote. But this isn't a criminal offence.

When can a civil penalty be applied to not registering to vote?

A civil penalty may be imposed if a person fails to apply to register when required to do so. This does not mean that you must cast a vote at an election. It means that if you are eligible to vote then you must register when asked to do so. Electoral Registration Officers are required to take the following actions before considering a civil penalty:

- Writing the individual to ask the individual to register and a further follow up reminder letter
- Making a visit to the individual's home to encourage them to apply to register.

How much is a civil penalty for?

The amount of a civil penalty is £80.

What are the exceptions to the rules on electoral registration civil penalties?

There are certain valid reasons why you may not have been able to respond to the requirement to register to vote such as:

- Physical absence from a household for an extended period of time
- Mental capacity including individuals with severe learning difficulties
- An individual that has endured a long hospital stay due to long term sickness or pre-existing medical conditions that require extensive hospital stays

The electoral registration officer at their discretion can also accept other reasons that they find valid for an individual not responding to an invitation to register to vote.

Are there any criminal offences involved in for not registering to vote?

A fine of up to £5,000 and/or up to six months in prison can be imposed if an individual knowingly provides false information on their voter registration form.

After

If you're asked to register and don't do so, you could be fined £80.

2. Change the words

 **GOV.UK**

Register as a waste carrier

BETA

This is a new service: your [feedback](#) will help us improve it.

[Back](#)

Has any owner, partner, manager, director or relevant person had any relevant convictions in the last 12 months?

▼ What are relevant convictions?

Relevant convictions are offences that come under

- Scrap Metal Dealers Act 1984
- section 1, 8, 9, 10, 11, 17, 18, 22 or 23 of the Theft Act 1968, where the offence related to scrap metal or is an environment-related offence
- section 170 or 170B of the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979, where the offence related to scrap metal
- section 9 of the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985
- section 1, 5 or 7 of the Control of Pollution (Amendment) Act 1989
- section 33, 34 or 34B of the Environmental Protection Act 1990
- section 55, 202 or 205 of the Water Resources Act 1991
- Transfrontier Shipment of Waste Regulations 1994
- section 110 of the Environment Act 1995
- Control of Major Accident Hazards Regulations 1999
- Pollution Prevention and Control (England and Wales) Regulations 2000
- part 1 of the Vehicles (Crimes) Act 2001
- regulation 17(1) of the Landfill (England and Wales) Regulations 2002
- section 327, 328 or 330 to 332 of the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002
- Hazardous Waste (England and Wales) Regulations 2005
- Hazardous Waste (Wales) Regulations 2005
- section 1 of the Fraud Act 2006, where the offence relates to scrap metal or is an environment related offence
- Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Regulations 2006
- regulation 38 of the Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2007
- Relevant Convictions Producer Responsibility
- Transfrontier Shipment of Waste Regulations 2007
- regulation 38 of the Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2010
- regulation 42 of the Waste (England and Wales) Regulations 2011
- section 146 of the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012
- Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Regulations 2013
- Scrap Metal Dealers Act 2013

◀ Yes

◀ No

Next

Before

Has anyone in management been convicted of an environmental offence in the last 12 months?

☐ Yes ☐ No

[Continue]

After

3. Hide the words

... if they're only relevant
to an edge case
(progressive disclosure)

[◀ Back](#) Question 5 of 11

What is your National Insurance number?

Example: QQ 12 34 56 C

▼ [I don't know my National Insurance number](#)

You can:

- look for your National Insurance number on payslips or official letters about tax, pensions or benefits
- [ask for a reminder through the post](#)

If you can't provide a National Insurance number, you will need to explain why. And after you've applied, you'll be asked to prove your identity by sending documents in the post.

[I can't provide a National Insurance number](#)

Continue

4. Turn a complex question into two simpler questions (using progressive disclosure to minimise cognitive load)

What is your nationality?

If you have dual nationality, select all options that are relevant to you.

☐ I am British

☐ I am Irish

☒ I am a citizen of another country

Which country?

If you have dual nationality, add another country

5. Change the answers

[◀ Back](#) Question 7 of 11

Do you also live at a second address?

☒ No☐ Yes, I spend time living at two homes☐ Yes, I'm a student with home and term-time addresses**Continue**

Tactics: legal and policy

Talk to
lawyers
directly

There's no such
thing as distinct
'legal' content

Or to put it another
way: all content is
legal content

If something is important to the user's decision making, highlight it in the main flow of the transaction

Don't bury it in a terms and conditions document

Clarity isn't the
enemy of compliance

Clarity means
greater legal
certainty

But understand
legitimate legal
concerns: negligent
misstatement,
judicial review

Some things worth reading

<http://nicolefenton.com/interface-writing/>

<http://uiwriting.tumblr.com/>

<https://digitaltransformation.blog.gov.uk/2014/08/14/9-content-tips-to-help-you-build-a-better-digital-service/>