Best Practices for Developing Answer Content
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Introduction

Well-written answer content is frequently overlooked in terms of its importance in increasing self-service rates and improving customer satisfaction. Attention to wording, answer organization, and format will ensure that customers read and comprehend your answer content. After years of working with customers around key aspects of self-service content, Oracle has identified several best practices areas for developing answer content that are outlined in this guide.

This document is intended to be used in conjunction with the Answer Content Tune-Up Checklist available at the RightNow Community. We recommend that you read this paper and work through the checklist before reviewing the findings with your client success manager. Assuming that you are already working with Oracle RightNow Knowledge Cloud Service to publish knowledgebase answers on a regular basis, this tune-up should take around one hour of focused time to complete. Additional time will be needed to implement any changes you identify, and this will vary depending on the depth of changes you want to make.
1. Write Content for Your Customers, Not for You

Written language is very powerful, and when used improperly it can result in significant confusion for the reader. With an increasingly global business environment and a trend toward the delivery of products and services to a diverse set of customers, it is more important than ever to write to the lowest common denominator to ensure that your content reaches the widest audience.

**Best Practice 1.1.** Answer content should be written in plain language and targeted at or below an 8th-grade (age 12 to 13) reading level.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Before (12th-grade reading level):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Per the terms of our Purchased-Services Agreement, all ticket transactions completed after September 1st 2003 are final.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>After (5th-grade reading level):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We're sorry, but we are no longer able to offer ticket refunds or exchanges.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 1.** Answer content rewritten in plain language caters to a global audience.

**Benefit.** Targeting a lower-grade reading level makes your content more easily understood by a global audience. Content written using technical, company-specific, or legal jargon may result in customers who abandon your self-service.

**Best Practice 1.2.** Use words that are familiar to your customers.

**Benefit.** Using the same words your customers use will ensure that you share a common understanding of their meaning.

**Ninjas are masters of the ancient art of combat and deception. Wielding swords, shurikens, and other exotic weapons, they can vanish from plain sight to perform damaging sneak attacks.**

**Figure 2.** This Oracle client (FreeRealms) uses a writing style that is familiar to its game-playing audience.

2. Organize Your Knowledgebase

Have a plan in place for organizing your knowledgebase articles in order to ensure that you have appropriate topic depth and coverage. Without thoughtful information architecture, a knowledgebase can quickly become disorganized and inefficient.

**Best Practice 2.1.** Design your answer content to match the taxonomy of your products or services.

**Benefit.** Aligning your support content with your products and services will help to avoid gaps or overlaps in your knowledgebase.

**Best Practice 2.2.** Break answers that contain multiple problems or questions into subanswers.

**Benefit.** Small, modular answers not only are easier to maintain but also result in a better knowledgebase experience.

**Best Practice 2.3.** Track changes between answer versions.
Benefit. Documenting changes to your answers over time will allow you to more efficiently manage and deliver quality content.

Figure 3. A hidden Word document attachment can be used to keep track of what changes are made to each answer over time.

3. Lay Out Your Content for Easy Scanning

In general, the vast majority of Website visitors will scan rather than carefully read content. This behavior requires a unique approach to presenting Website content. Content that has been designed to accommodate scanning will help these customers achieve higher self-service success rates.

Best Practice 3.1. Use two to three sentences per paragraph.

Benefit. Long paragraphs are overwhelming. One look at a giant block of text, and a customer may decide to abandon your site.

Best Practice 3.2. Use a bulleted (or ordered) list anytime you provide a series of items.

Benefit. Important items are easy to miss when they are embedded in a paragraph. Using bullets draws attention and encourages a quick review of each item.
Best Practice 3.3. Use bolding to draw attention to important fragments and sentences. About 5 percent of your content should be bolded.

**Benefit.** Careful use of bolding will work like an eye magnet. A bolded fragment says, “This stuff is important; you should look here even if you skip everything else.”

Best Practice 3.4. Limit your answers to 50 to 350 words each.

**Benefit.** Long answers can be intimidating. Short answers help customers feel more self-confident and assured that they can easily achieve self-service success.

4. Carefully Use Rich Media

Large Web pages (in terms of kilobytes) have been shown to increase visitor abandonment. Even a small delay in page load times can be enough to cause customers to give up on their self-service experience.

As the number of customers using mobile devices to access content continues to rise, care should be given to reduce the page load times experienced through these devices. Mobile devices have slower connections than desktop computers with broadband connections.

**Best Practice 4.1.** The total size of an individual answer page should be as small as possible and not exceed 100 KB.

**Benefit.** Page size is a leading indicator of Web page bounce rates. Large page sizes result in increased abandonment.
Analysis and Recommendations

- **Best Practice 4.1.** Congratulations. The total number of HTML files on this page (including the main HTML file) is 1, which most browsers can multithread. Minimizing the number of HTML requests to fewer than 1 or 2 is key for web site optimization. (L)

- **Best Practice 4.2.** Don’t force customers to use video.

  **Benefit.** Video is not accessible to people with disabilities. In addition, some mobile devices are unable to play video.

  Figure 5. A screen output from the free service WebSiteOptimization.com can help you make answer page size as small as possible.

- **Best Practice 4.3.** Use graphics strategically.

  **Benefit.** A picture is worth 1,000 words and is more engaging than text alone.

  Figure 6. Zoomerang offers video to its customers but also provides alternatives (such as PDFs) to access the same information.
Best Practice 4.4. Plan for touchscreen interaction.

Benefit. By using buttons or clearly spaced links, you will make it easier for people using a touchscreen device to use your Website.
**Best Practice 4.5.** Use PDFs appropriately and avoid other file attachment types.

**Benefit.** PDFs are appropriate for technical documentation, written papers, and other publications that are generally intended to be saved for offline reference. Avoid other file types that could prevent your content from being accessed by a wider audience.

![Figure 9. British Telecommunications (BT) provides PDF files for users who want to download and print the user guide.](image)
5. Use the Answer Editor Properly

The Answer Editor feature of Oracle RightNow Knowledge Cloud Service includes several tools that can help you develop high-quality content. This section offers best practice guidance on using these tools.

**Best Practice 5.1.** Run a report to ensure that keywords are not being used for more than 20 percent of your answers.

**Benefit.** Keywords in Oracle RightNow CX Cloud Service work a bit differently than you might expect. Use keywords sparingly (or not at all) to ensure that your customers have a good search experience.

![Answers and their Keywords...](image)

### Answers and their Keywords

RightNow recommends that you use keywords on no more than 20% of your Answers, surprisingly, using too many keywords often makes for a less accurate IR/search experience.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer ID</th>
<th>Summary</th>
<th>Keywords</th>
<th>Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>92</td>
<td>What about after graduation?</td>
<td>What about after graduation?</td>
<td>Open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>79</td>
<td>What is Red Eye?</td>
<td>pictures</td>
<td>Open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>How can I get my product repaired?</td>
<td>no Value</td>
<td>Open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Open Box for Scratch and Dent items</td>
<td>no Value</td>
<td>Open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Gift Cards</td>
<td>no Value</td>
<td>Open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Learn more about using &quot;My Support&quot;</td>
<td>no Value</td>
<td>Open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Order Online</td>
<td>no Value</td>
<td>Open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Resetting frozen MP3 Player</td>
<td>no Value</td>
<td>Open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Email Privacy Policy</td>
<td>no Value</td>
<td>Open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Factory Plug out</td>
<td>no Value</td>
<td>Open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Marine Audio Installation Suggestions</td>
<td>no Value</td>
<td>Open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Syncing PC's Music Library with MP3 Player</td>
<td>no Value</td>
<td>Open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Marine Installation Notes</td>
<td>no Value</td>
<td>Open</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 10. This report is available at the RightNow Community (see the Answer Content Tune-Up Checklist for a link) and will show you a list of all answers in your knowledgebase and their keywords.

**Best Practice 5.2.** Use the question field properly.

**Benefit.** If you struggle to write distinct and helpful question and summary fields, simply remove the question field in order to provide a better customer experience.
Best Practices for Developing Answer Content

Best Practice 5.3. Limit your summary lines to five to seven words, and write each one like a newspaper headline.

Benefit. Punchy and attention-grabbing summary lines help customers recognize that a particular answer is the one they need.

Before:
Where can I find a list of system requirements to run Oracle’s products?

After:
System requirements for Oracle products

Figure 12. This summary line has been rewritten from a question into a concise statement of only five words.

Best Practice 5.4. Understand basic HTML, and keep an eye on the source code for answers.

Benefit. Clean HTML will help to ensure that answer content displays properly when published and is also accessible to people with disabilities.
Best Practice 5.5. Carefully associate each answer with the minimum set of applicable products or categories.

**Benefit.** In the Web Experience Design Tune-Up available at the RightNow Community, we recommend the use of product/category selection as a prominent feature on the Support home page. This provides a more engaging experience.
Best Practices for Developing Answer Content

**Best Practice 5.6.** Avoid answer types of “URL” and “Attachment.” Place this content in its own answer when possible.

**Benefit.** This will ensure that your content is more easily searchable and is also accessible to people with disabilities.

### 6. Monitor Key Content Frequently

Performing frequent quality monitoring of your knowledgebase content will help you identify important areas for improvement.

**Best Practice 6.1.** Ensure that the Answer Feedback Widget feature of Oracle RightNow Customer Portal Cloud Service is enabled, and that the content owner reviews the resulting incidents.

**Benefit.** Taking action on customer feedback will ensure a high-quality knowledgebase.

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**Option 4: Browse by picture**

- Mice
- Keyboard + Mice Combos
- Webcams
- Remote Controls
- Headsets
- Audio
- Gaming
- Keyboards

Figure 15. Oracle recommends the use of a product or category user interface in Oracle RightNow Customer Portal Cloud Service. Properly associating your answers with products or categories will ensure that only the right information is displayed.

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Figure 16. The Answer Feedback Widget asks the customer how an answer could be improved if it is rated as not helpful.
Best Practice 6.2. Use a report to monitor the answer feedback scores across all of the answers in your knowledgebase.

**Benefit.** Rather than taking action on every single “No” answer feedback incident that you receive, it is often better to wait until a pattern of negative responses is detected and then rewrite your low-scoring answers.

![Figure 17](image1.png)

**Figure 17.** This custom report can be imported from the RightNow Community to show the feedback scores for each answer in your knowledgebase, as well as response rates.

Best Practice 6.3. Check your support Website for broken links.

**Benefit.** If customers need access to information that is hidden behind a broken link, they will not be able to self-serve.

![Figure 18](image2.png)

**Figure 18.** The free Xenu Link Sleuth application automatically shows a list of all the dead links you have on your support Website.
7. Create a Style Guide for Your Knowledgebase

We recommend developing a knowledgebase style guide for your organization to ensure that you offer a consistent experience. You may want to include the information covered in this Tune-Up as well as addressing some additional issues:

- Do you have a master Oracle RightNow Customer Portal Cloud Service stylesheet and specific HTML tags that you want authors to use?

- How will you avoid using links that just say Click Here? Will you use inline links like these, or provide the entire URL? Will you create an answer of URL type for each link that you insert so you can track hits to each link?

- Do you want to promote a particular style of writing or voice in your answers? Is humor acceptable or even preferred?

- Will links on your Website always open in the same window, or do you have content that should open in a new tab?

- Are there legal or other organizational policy concerns that your authors should consider when writing an answer?

Conclusion

Now that you are familiar with the Oracle best practices for answer content, we recommend that you use the Answer Content Tune-Up Checklist to perform an assessment of your Website against these best practices. This will show you where you have the greatest opportunities for improvement.

Note that these best practices are intended to be used as heuristics or rules of thumb. If you have true customer research or firsthand usability testing that suggests a different approach, that data should supersede these recommendations.

We also recommend that you check out the other Tune-Up packages available at the RightNow Community, particularly the Web Experience Design and Knowledgebase and Search offerings.

1 community.rightnow.com/customer/support/tuneup.php