

**Guest editor blog:
Deborah Bosley**

***Empathy: The
Forgotten Element in
Successful Content
Creation***

Deborah Bosley, the past-President of PLAIN, shares a blog based on the talk she gave at PLAIN's conference in Dublin.

You can read Dr. Bosley's blog below.

Holiday greetings from PLAIN president Neil James

In the last of the PLAIN newsletters for 2016, it is worth reflecting on what has been a very busy year for PLAIN. After the success of our 2015 conference in Dublin, we selected the Austrian plain language organization Klarsprache to host our 2017 conference in Graz in September next year. This is the first conference we have held in a German speaking country, and reinforces our push to become increasingly international. Our Board members alone now represent eight countries, ranging from Scandinavia and Central Europe to South America and Canada.

We offered our first life membership to PLAIN co-founder Cheryl Stephens in 2016, in what will become a broader professional development program including new awards in 2017. And after upgrading or establishing our website, Twitter and Facebook pages last year, in 2016 we took over management of the Plain Language Supporters group on LinkedIn. The group is now called PLAIN and has 18,700 members, making it the largest plain language forum in the world.

We also responded to member feedback about more regular communications and set up this email newsletter, PLAIN Matters, which has arrived in your inbox four times this year. This emerged from member consultation on our strategic plan, which we finalized this year and which will guide our actions until 2020. And of course, PLAIN has a new look and logo.

But if 2016 was busy, 2017 will be even better. Our plans for a new e-journal will move to publication. Our membership strategy will offer a raft of new benefits to keep our membership growing. We will improve our member directory, start to investigate certification and pilot an exciting new survey about the status of plain language in four countries. I look forward to seeing you in Austria in September where you can catch up on the most up-to-date developments in plain language internationally.

PLAIN elects 4 new board members

At the 2016 Annual General Meeting held in Sydney on October 7, PLAIN elected 4 new Board members. President Neil James also thanked the 3 outgoing Board members for their hard work and dedication. They were Deborah Bosley, who had served as President and Vice-President, Ingrid Sapona as Treasurer; and Kim McCutcheon, Website Manager.

One of the requests from members of PLAIN at the 2015 AGM in Dublin was that there should be more Board members representing non-English speaking countries. So we are particularly pleased to announce that 3 of the incoming Board members are from non-English speaking countries, highlighting PLAIN's international plain language reach.

Find out more about your new Board members Anki Mattson, Diane Macgregor, Vera Gergely and Margrethe Kvarenes [here](#).

- Conference news -

Mark your 2017 calendar

Here are some important dates for PLAIN's conference in Graz:

| | |
|--------------|--------------------------------------|
| January 2 | Registration opens |
| March 15 | Deadline for submission of proposals |
| April 15 | Notification of acceptance |
| June 30 | End of early bird registration |
| August 31 | End of regular registration |
| September 20 | Late registration accepted |

Registration opens Jan 2 for Graz

You can register starting January 2 for PLAIN's conference in Graz in September 2017. The conference website is up [here](#)

Do you tweet? Look for and use our conference hashtag [#PLAIN2017](#)

- Guest editor blog: Deborah Bosley -

As the past-President of PLAIN, I would like to share this blog with you as some of you may have heard the talk that I gave at PLAIN's conference last year in Dublin.

I also want to welcome new (and long-standing) members to our newsletter, which is full of interesting resources to help you as a practitioner and an advocate for plain language. This section of the newsletter focuses on specific issues relevant to your work. I am honored to have been asked to write this blog for you.

So I hope you will take a few minutes to read and think about emotions: how we feel about PLAIN, how we feel about our clients, and how we express emotions in our writing. Thank you for taking the time to read this blog and PLAIN's newsletter.

Empathy: The Forgotten Element in Successful Content Creation

"People who lean on logic and philosophy and rational exposition end by starving the best part of the mind."

This quote by William Butler Yeats, one of Ireland's most famous writers, illustrates a problem we have in the content creation community.

We create a multitude of written material, however, we rely primarily on creating logical structures, building authority, using plain language, and applying information design principles.

But we pay little attention to how readers respond emotionally to what they read. Our brain is constructed with a close, physical proximity of language and emotions. No wonder that words have such power to evoke and provoke us.

We know our customers, when faced with complex text or are unable to find what they're looking for, respond with anger,

About Deborah

Dr. Deborah S. Bosley is the Owner and Principal at [The Plain Language Group](#) (TPLG) and a Professor Emerita of Technical Communication at UNC Charlotte. A long-time believer that good writing is good business, she has spent the past 20 years helping corporations, higher education, and government agencies create written information that is easy for people to understand and use. The Plain Language Group helps Fortune 100/500 companies, primarily in the financial and technology sectors, increase profits, build customer trust, and meet compliance standards by creating written information that's easy for people to understand and use.

Deborah served 6 years on the Board of PLAIN and was President from 2013 to 2015, then Vice-President from 2015 – 2016. She is also on the Board of the [Center for Plain Language](#).

Talk to us!

Let us know what you think about our newsletter. Do you have a suggestion for a guest editor? Have you won an award? Have you seen an example of good - and bad - plain language you want other PLAIN members to see? Is there some other news you want to share?

Please contact us at:
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frustration, fear, etc. According to a 2013 survey, 68% of US consumers experienced “customer rage.” But what can we do about that?

We need to understand emotional responses and write with empathy. Cognitive empathy is the largely conscious drive to accurately recognize and understand another’s emotions. Why is that critical for content creators? Because people make decisions with their emotions, and then use data and logic to justify that decision. We, on the other hand, write as if the emotional response had far less power than it does.

The marketing world has long been aware of how people respond and act based on their emotions. They use fear, guilt, trust, value, belonging, competition, instant gratification, leadership, trends, and the pressure of time to motivate people to purchase products and services.

However, much of what content creators write is not marketing materials. Instead, readers engage with Terms and Conditions, Help Centers, FAQs, and a multitude of information that users need to solve problems. In fact, often anything written in “marketingese” is immediately dismissed as “selling,” not “solving.”

The emotions we should be expressing and eliciting are trust, confidence, relief, protection, and understanding. We should help readers trust what we say, have confidence in their decisions, feel relief that the text was easy and they found the solution, feel that the company or government agency has their back, and easily understand what action they should take.

If we can do that, if we can write with empathy, we will have responded to a person’s need to understand and be understood.