

Words By Wendy

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Top Ten Tips for More Effective Copy

Educate ... Inspire ... Motivate: three simple steps that are integral to any successful marketing campaign.

Whether you are preparing your own copy, or evaluating the work of a professional copywriter, check your words against these ten quick copywriting tips. You will end up with marketing materials that are noticeably more persuasive, compelling and responsive:

1. A Picture Tells a Thousand Words

When someone opens your web page, or glances at your brochure, they eye naturally goes straight to the picture, then to the headline, then to the copy.

So think of your graphic element as a starting point - a way to lead the eye you're your sales message – and then add captions. People tend to read the captions first, so they are a crucial introduction to your message.

2. The Headline

Every piece you produce should have a headline, even web pages and sales letters.

This is the first piece of copy that is read, and it helps your prospect to decide whether to bother with your materials. Get this one wrong, and you will have lost your chance.

If possible keep your headline to a maximum of 8 words, and avoid using all capital letters. Make sure your headline focuses on benefits, not on the features of your product or service.

The Relationship Marketing Copywriter

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3. Tell Your Story

Time and time again, people say “the copy has to be short because no-one reads long copy”.
Wrong!

Certainly people won't read long copy if it is boring, badly written or irrelevant to them. But studies have shown that well-crafted long copy still outsells short in most cases. The key is that you need to provide all the information your prospect requires to convince them to take the next step (i.e. respond).

So, make sure your copy is well-written, relevant and informative; make sure it overcomes objectives and provides reasons to respond. But never be afraid to give information that is vital to your sales message.

4. Benefits

Why are people reading your message? For one reason, and one reason only – they are wondering **what it can do for them**.

Your copy should focus on specific benefits. Not ‘this coffee maker makes the best cup of coffee’, but rather ‘imagine waking up every morning to the smell of freshly brewed coffee, and the best pick-me-up you ever tasted’. It's an inspiring vision.

If you don't lead straight in with a very strong benefit, there is every chance that your prospect will pass straight on by.

5. Features

Having established your benefits, of course, those should be supported by information on features and the facts and data necessary to back up your claims. Make sure that your promises are credible.

Just to differentiate here – benefits are the end result that your client experiences. Features are the parts or aspects of your product or service that help to create that end result.

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6. Arresting Words

Direct marketing research has shown us that certain words have a powerful ability to gain attention. 'You' is the most important word you will use in your copy. It forces you to talk directly to your prospect and it helps to establish a rapport.

Words such as 'new', 'free', 'now', 'expert', 'limited time offer' and 'specialist' will also help you to attract attention. These words should be up-front and obvious to capture your prospect and convince them to explore your message further.

7. Scanning

Most people don't start by studying even the most fascinating copy – who has the time? People scan for the most exciting facts.

The finest copywriters make it very simple for the prospect to quickly scan for anything interesting. If they find plenty, they may go back and study your copy afterwards, but be aware that this is how they will start.

To make your writing easy to scan, and easy to read, consider the following:

- Bullet points, sub-heads, colour, underlining and bold copy help to highlight the most pertinent facts for a quick scan.
- Avoid long blocks of unbroken text. Keep sentences and paragraphs short.
- Do not reverse pale text out of a dark coloured background, have a graphic behind the text. It's hard on the eye.
- Avoid using all capital letters – even in a headline.
- Keep your type at a minimum of 12pt so it's not too small to read.

Incidentally, people will scan right to the bottom of a web page, or the P.S. in a sales letter. So, always conclude by summarizing your benefit statement and asking for a response.

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8. Tone and Language

Your prospect should feel that the piece was written specifically for them, and the more personal the tone, the more likely your prospect is to warm to the message. That's why one of the most important words you will use is 'you'.

To make sure your copy is appropriate for your target audience, follow these rules:

- Write in the same tone you would use in a face to face conversation with your prospect.
- Use the active voice (as opposed to saying 'the active voice should be used').
- Be brief and get straight to the point. Unless you're telling a fascinating and relevant story, you'll lose your prospect before they grasp what you're trying to get at.
- Use short sentences and paragraphs - they are easier to read and look less intimidating on the page.
- Avoid superlatives – they just sound like exaggeration, and can damage the credibility of your entire message.
- Avoid using jargon, and write to the level of your least educated or informed prospect.

9. Credibility

Your prospects are bombarded by superlatives and outrageous claims all day long. Most of the time they don't really believe those claims, and who can blame them?

Avoid superlatives, and back up all your claims with hard facts. Include statistics, case studies and testimonials wherever possible. (And try to include a full name and company name or city if possible. Otherwise they look fabricated.)

Offer a guarantee if possible. It shows that you have faith in your product or service, and, surprisingly, the longer the guarantee, the fewer returns you will get.

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10. Call to Action

Just because you have presented a powerful sales message doesn't mean your prospect is going to respond. So, tell them to.

Every piece you produce should tell your prospect, clearly and often, what they should do next. Show a phone number and contact button, repeatedly; tell them to visit the store and bring the coupon; remind them to return the reply card; etc, etc, etc. And, whenever possible, give a choice of response vehicles to suit different people's preferences.

Thanks for reading - even though the 'rules' vary between different media – and particularly between online and offline media – these tips are a great starting point for ensuring that your copy is readable and compelling.

About The Author

Wendy Zak is The Relationship Marketing Copywriter. She uses tested and proven direct response techniques to write marketing copy that keeps your prospects reading, nodding their heads and responding.

Wendy specializes in writing for 'search engine marketing' media such as websites, e-zine articles, blogging and social media – as well as print pieces designed to draw traffic to your website. They provide a perfect opportunity to build relationships, make connections and generate responses;

Do you want to harness the power of copy designed to engage, educate and inspire; copy powerful enough to motivate a reaction and a response?

If so, call Wendy Zak now on **403-279-3606** or email [**wendy@wordsbywendy.ca**](mailto:wendy@wordsbywendy.ca)

Please visit [**www.wordsbywendy.ca**](http://www.wordsbywendy.ca) to find out more, and to sign up for my blog.

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