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Writing That Sells... A Guide to Effective Copywriting

If everything begins with a sale, then we are all selling something to somebody. Some of us are selling products or services for cash, while others (such as charitable organizations) are selling the idea that their cause is worthy of support. Even people who offer things for free are selling something – that what they are providing is useful.

Copywriting services

Copywriting is an essential element of any sales or marketing effort, regardless of the medium chosen to deliver it. Here are some typical projects that benefit from copywriting:

- *Printed sales material:* brochure, display ad, direct mail campaign, product description, sales letters
- *Printed informational material:* case study, white paper, newsletter article
- *Web sites:* landing and inner pages, SEO content
- *Social media:* blogging, Facebook, tweets

Besides creating original material, copywriting services may also include proofreading and editing of existing text. Proofreading checks for spelling, grammar, and sentence structure – the basic elements that readers use to judge the quality of the writing. Editing looks at context and syntax – the elements that improve or hinder the reader’s comprehension of the text. Neither proofreading nor editing includes rewriting, though.



Effective copywriting matters

Direct response copywriting – using the written or spoken word to get people to take some form of action – requires the same skills when used for traditional media (print, television, radio) or new media (web sites and social media). In addition, search engine optimization (SEO) is a new use for copywriting that is growing in importance.

When we are selling, communication with our audience is grounded in the mechanics of the sales process. One enduring description of the sales process is summarized by the acronym AIDA: get the reader’s *attention*; engage his *interest*; create *desire* to own; and provoke *action*. The AIDA concept is attributed to E. St. Elmo Lewis, an American advertising and sales pioneer, who developed it in 1898 – well over 100 years ago. Based on customer studies in the U.S. life

Writing That Sells (cont)

insurance market, the steps are still accepted as a description of four phases buyers follow when accepting a new idea or purchasing a new product.

Here is a way to apply the four AIDA steps to a copywriting project:

- *Attention:* Use a compelling headline to attract the reader's attention. Then use a subhead to reinforce the headline, and an illustration or photograph for emphasis.
- *Interest and desire:* Develop interest beginning with the first sentence of the body copy. Its sole purpose is to get the reader to read the next sentence. So focus on benefits to the reader rather than features of the product or service.
- *Desire:* Use the second and subsequent paragraphs to elaborate on benefits and describe how the product or service will solve a problem or enhance the reader's life. Aim for a logical progression of benefits that ends with the reader concluding "I must have this."
- *Action:* The final paragraph is the call to action – it tells the reader what to do next. Add a final thought as a P.S. to further stimulate desire and action.

Compelling content is based on knowledge

Before you begin writing, it is important to understand the target market, the benefits your product or service brings to the target market, and what motivates the buying decision. Very large corporations or businesses find these answers with research, focus groups, and other techniques outside the budget of a small business or local non-profit organization.

So then, how can you get the information you need? An excellent way is to ask your top customers. Most businesses follow the *Pareto principle*, better known as the *80-20 rule*. As applied to business, the Pareto principle states that 80% of sales come from 20% of customers, making the task of surveying customers a lot more manageable. Here is what you want to learn from

a combination of survey questions and what you already know about your customers:

- *What demographic characteristics do your customers share?* For individuals, this could include age, marital status, household income, ethnicity, etc. For businesses and organizations, SIC code, annual sales, number of employees, etc.
- *What separates your product or service from those of your competitors?* Look for measurable characteristics like better performance, more features and benefits, on time delivery, ease of ordering, etc.
- *What motivates your customers to buy?* Is it price? Delivery time? Superior quality?

With the answers you are better prepared to write the copy to develop the interest and desire. You will also know what kind of an offer to make.

Copy that sells

Using the AIDA approach means keeping the reader engaged from the headline all the way through to the call to action. This is best done by keeping the copy itself straightforward, focused, and easy to understand. Here are some guidelines:

- *Keep the focus on the reader.* An excellent test of this concept is to be sure the copy answers the reader's question "what's in it for me?" When you apply this test, it becomes instantly apparent why leading with benefits is more persuasive than a list of features. *Made of titanium* (a feature) is less persuasive than *will last a lifetime* (a benefit).
- *Use a topic sentence for each paragraph.* A topic sentence is the theme or main idea for the paragraph and is usually the first or last sentence. All sentences in the paragraph support the topic sentence by providing evidence or a persuasive argument.
- *Present evidence.* By citing accepted positions, research or statistics you'll be giving the reader more than your opinion

"...four phases buyers follow when accepting a new idea or purchasing a new product."

"Before you begin writing, it is important to understand the target market..."

"... how can you get the information you need?"

Writing That Sells (cont)

and be building credibility. This is especially important if you are developing a new or counter intuitive idea.

- *Provide a specific offer.* No matter what you are selling – a product, service, or idea – it has to be specifically stated to be accepted. Without a clear, even bold offer, you risk the reader misinterpreting what you have said.
- *End with a summary.* Restate the original benefits and remind the reader of the evidence you presented to support the benefit.

Don't settle for bad writing

Some people are natural writers – they intuitively know how to develop an idea that persuades

others. That's why people follow syndicated columnists and read editorials.

But if writing is not your strength, or if you lack experience in direct response copywriting, consider hiring a writer to do this work. As a skill, it is as important as good graphic design. Here at TechneGraphics we can help you with copywriting tasks, either with our staff or using outside resources. Contact us at 248-2121 for more information.

“Some people are natural writers – they intuitively know how to develop an idea...”

Q. Please give a comprehensive definition of social media.

A. Effectiveness for business is an evolving topic. In May 2011, Heidi Cohen, a self-described actionable marketing expert and owner of Riverside Marketing Strategies gave this definition of social media:

Social media are the platforms that enable the interactive web by engaging users to participate in, comment on, and create content, as a means of communicating with their social graph, other users, and the public. Social media has the following characteristics:

- Encompasses wide variety of content formats, including text, video, photographs, audio, PDF, and PowerPoint. Many social media make use

of these options by allowing more than one content alternative.

- Allows interactions to cross one or more platforms through social sharing, e-mail, and feeds.
- Involves different levels of engagement by participants who can create, comment, or lurk on social media networks.
- Facilitates enhanced speed and breadth of information dissemination.
- Provides for one-to-one, one-to-many, and many-to-many communications.
- Enables communication to take place in real time or asynchronously over time.
- Is device indifferent. It can take place via a computer (including laptops and netbooks), tablets (including iPads, iTouch and others) and mobile phones (particularly smartphones).
- Extends engagement by creating real-time online events, extending online interactions offline, or augmenting live events online.

“Social media are the platforms that enable the interactive web by...”

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Creating a Sense of Urgency



*“... a sense of urgency
is a device to give
readers a reason to
respond quickly.”*

In marketing, a *sense of urgency* is a device to give readers a reason to respond quickly. When reading an advertisement, people have a tendency to procrastinate – to put the advertisement aside and consider it later. A sense of urgency helps overcome this tendency by providing a reason to act immediately.

There are two common ways to create a sense of urgency: offer a reward for prompt action, or assess a penalty for not acting. Some examples of a reward include a free gift for responding or a bonus with purchase; an

example of a penalty is a limited supply of the product or service being offered or a sale that lasts for a defined period of time.

A sense of urgency works by creating scarcity – the reader must act by a given deadline or be among the established number of people to respond. The sense of urgency can be undermined if the deadline or other conditions are not strictly enforced.