

Words By Wendy

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Ten Tips for More Effective Copy

By Wendy Zak

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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 copywriting tips. You will end up with marketing materials that are noticeably more persuasive, compelling and responsive:

1. The Whole Story

Time and time again, my clients say to me "the copy has to be short because no-one will read it if it is too long". **Wrong!**

There are many reasons why people will fail to read copy. For instance if it is:

- boring
- badly written
- irrelevant to them
- too technical (or not technical enough, depending on the market),

and many others, but 'too long' is not one of those reasons. Simply, if your copy is interesting to the prospect, and well written, you can include as much information as possible, and they will read it; in fact, more information will probably help to overcome their objections. Studies have shown that long copy outsells short.

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Of course, for that to be the case, you also have to integrate the other nine copywriting tips below!

2. 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 at all times 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’.

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

3. The Headline

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

This is the first piece of copy that is read, and it is very often the criterion on which the appeal of the entire piece is judged by your prospect. Get this one wrong, and you may not have a chance to convince them to take a further look.

Experienced copywriters generally agree that the headline is one of the most time-consuming elements of any project, because it is so vital.

4. A Picture Tells a Thousand Words

This is an interesting one, because it may very well be the picture that attracts your prospect’s eye to your piece. The eye does, indeed, go straight to the picture, then to the headline, then to the copy.

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However, your picture is just a way to capture attention – without the copy to tell the story, your prospect will not linger long. If possible, always give your photographs a caption. Omitting a caption is a waste of one of your most valuable opportunities to capture the prospect's interest.

So, think of your graphic element as a way to lead the eye into the copy. And always make sure that you have a powerful headline, and copy that leads the prospect ever onward to your desired conclusion.

5. 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 address their concerns and needs. This is the way to establish a relationship.

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.

6. Scanning

It is very important to know that most people do not thoroughly study 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 the piece and access anything that is of particular interest to them. If they find plenty, they may

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go back and study the entire piece afterwards, but be aware that this is how they will start.

Bullet points, sub-heads, colour, underlining, bold copy and other layout features make it easy for the scanners among us to find the most pertinent facts and make their assessment.

Incidentally, in a sales letter, often the first part read is the P.S. Never send out a letter without at least one P.S. This is where your greatest benefit should shine.

7. The Personal Approach

This is kind of an extension of Point 2 above, dealing with emphasizing your benefits. 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.

One of the most important words you can use is **'you'**.

There are some exceptions, like in very technical pieces where this may be inappropriate, but on the whole it is a very useful rule.

8. Readable Layouts

Partly because, as we have already established, people scan, it is very important that the text is easy on the eye.

In books and newspapers, we are used to reading serif faces, such as this one, which have the little tails at the end of each stroke (*as opposed to this one*). We are also used to seeing type in black out of white, and printed in a mixture of upper and lower case.

It can be very tempting to use creative typesetting as a way to add drama and visual impact to a piece, but this should only be done with the greatest of care. Following

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these rules will really improve your readability:

- Serif typefaces for print materials; san serif for online
- Avoid blocks of capital letters – even in headlines
- Do not reverse pale coloured text out of dark backgrounds
- Avoid positioning text over a dark background, or busy pictures
- 12 pt is about the most comfortable size for reading printed materials.
- Paragraphs are easier to read if they are separated by a double line space, and if they end in part lines, or single words, breaking up the appearance of a block.

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 always make sure that those testimonials 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.

10. The Response

Finally, and it seems incredible to have to say this, but it is vital to tell the prospect what they should do next!

A remarkable number of advertising and marketing pieces do not give clear directions on what course of action is expected. Many people feel that if you have reached the end of the message with a prospect, they should be able to work out how

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they wish to contact you. Never make this assumption.

Every piece you produce should tell your prospect, clearly and often, what they should do next. Give a phone number, 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.

So, in conclusion, I hope you found this report compelling (and easy to read!).

If you would like to find out more about expanding your customer base with marketing materials that educate, motivate and lead the prospect towards your desired action, please phone me today at:

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Visit www.wordsbywendy.ca for more ideas on marketing your small business on a slim budget.

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