

How to turn your worst e-mail gaffes into gold

By Lisa Sparks

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Mistakes. We all make them and no one wants to admit to them. We're all faced with the question, how do we recover after we make the occasional slip-up? When it comes to e-mail marketing there's a huge debate over whether to 'fess up or to make like an ostrich and stick our heads in the sand. I'll offer my solution in four words: Own up to it.

You'll earn respect from your peers and you'll gain more credibility in the process. That is, if you handle it correctly. Here's what I did to recover from a major mistake when I published a recent issue of my e-mail newsletter.

The scenario: I wanted to write an article about avoiding typos. So I did. It was a good article on how to squeeze the most out of your spellcheck software before sending something off to another set of eyes for final proofing.

The mistake: I wrote the introductory paragraph to the newsletter in which the article would appear and I went back to rewrite it. Not once, not twice but three times. And I did this after my whole routine of spellchecking, getting others to proofread and then re-reading it myself. Only one word was misspelled and it was one word too many. I didn't know of the slip-up until two of my subscribers let me know what happened. By then, it was too late to change it. The entire list had my dire mistake. As a copywriter, I should know how to spell the word "speaking."

The solution: I sent out a follow-up e-mail and turned my mistake into a credibility-building lesson. In the follow-up e-mail I told readers how they could avoid the same mistake I did. I owned up to the mistake, told the readers how to avoid it in their practices and thanked them for continuing to be loyal readers. The subject line of the e-mail was "Copy Quickie" and here's what I wrote:

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Jill,

I have a quick piece of information to add on to this month's "Copywriting Secrets." In the introduction to this month's newsletter I wrote "Speakging of questions, a reader from Coral Gables . . ." I misspelled "speaking." How embarrassing!

And this in an issue where I extol the virtues of zapping typos.

Let's turn this snafu into something special.

If I can do it, anyone can do it. Here's how to avoid it.

Set a re-write limit. That's right. Tell yourself you'll only re-write your copy two or three times. (More than that and you could be asking for the rather unfortunate mistake I just made.)

If you're like me you add small bits of info just before deadline to give your copy extra oomph. Sit on your hands if you have to, but don't add anything at the last minute.

By using the technique I just mentioned even the most skillfully hidden typos will come into the blazing sunlight - before you hit send!

Thanks for reading. And have a great week.

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The result: I received a flood of e-mails from clients, prospects and friends congratulating me on having the "guts" to send out the follow-up message. I received requests to write more articles and my business kept chugging along without fail. Yes, I had two unsubscribes. And yes I saw an uptick in subscriptions in the weeks afterwards. I chalk that up to the ebb and flow of any e-mail marketing campaign and not to my unfortunate misstep.

Bottom line: Own up to your mistake. If you notice it and other readers notice it, then most likely everyone else on your list has seen it, too. No sense in hiding. Turn the mistake into a lesson for your audience. That way, they see that you're looking out for them and you're not afraid to put your credibility on the line to spare them the trouble of going through the same mistake you just made.

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About the Author

Lisa Sparks, President and Founder of Integrity Writing, Inc, specializes in writing business newsletters, brochures, advertisements, articles, sales letters and press releases for leading companies in the United States and abroad. Sign up for her monthly writing tips at <http://www.integritywriting.com/> .

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