

Back to Copywriting Basics

By Mark Laing

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Mark Laing

mlaing@graphicsandwords.com

Graphicsandwords.com <http://www.graphicsandwords.com>

You've probably read lots on effective copywriting strategies, how to utilize keywords, and various tricks of the trade for making sure your copywriting is as effective as possible. This is good stuff ... anything that results in a better website is worth reading and absorbing.

However, before you learn to walk, you need to learn to crawl. Before you begin focusing on the technical aspects of copywriting, it's a good idea to get a handle on the basics.

With that in mind, here are a few things to keep in mind when you're pecking away at your keyboard, trying to come up with effective copy for your site.

- * Catch your visitor's attention right away. They'll be gone in two seconds otherwise.
- * Keep it short. Keep it simple. Keep it to the point.
- * Along the same lines, focus. Don't try to do too much with one article or one page of copy. You are not a novelist - you're selling your services or product.
- * Use the active tense ... don't say 'the product can be bought by clicking on this link?', say 'click on this link to buy the product?.'
- * Don't use jargon. You're writing to inform, to convince and to sell, not to confuse.
- * If you have a choice between a small word and a big word, use the small word.
- * Keep a dictionary at hand, and use it.
- * Know your audience. If you're targeting university professors, you won't write the same kind of copy you'd aim at skateboarders (unless your target audience is skateboarding university professors - in which case you've got problems).
- * Keep the tone consistent. If you're writing using an informal, conversational style, don't switch in midstream to a formal legalistic style. It'll throw your readers off.
- * Tell the truth. Not only will you avoid being sued, but you'll achieve credibility. This translates into long term profitability. Trust us.
- * Similar to the last point, don't exaggerate. Kill the superlatives and the exclamation marks. Let the reader decide if they are excited or not. If you've done your job, they will be.
- * For website copy, use bullets and point form, and break up copy with subheads. Short attention spans and monitor-induced eyestrain makes this essential.
- * Forget word counts and padding your copy. Say what you have to say - if it only takes 150 words to get your message out (or 75, or even 25), that's a good thing. You've made your point, and your reader can move on and buy your product or service.
- * After you've finished writing, read your copy out loud to yourself. You'll be surprised at how many mistakes you'll catch this way. It also lets you know if your writing has a natural flow to it.
- * Don't fall in love with a particular phrase or paragraph, no matter how great it sounds. Ask

yourself, ?does it fit into the objective of my copy?? If the answer is no, kill it.

* Don't be happy with your first draft. Edit, rewrite, and edit some more. On the other hand, you're not following in the footsteps of Hemingway ... don't overedit or overanalyze, or you'll never finish the job.

*When you're done, be receptive to constructive criticism. Let others read your work before it goes online, and if they point out mistakes, rewrite.

Following the above advice will go a long way to ensuring your web copy is readable and does what it's supposed to do - promote your business.

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