

7 Tips for Finding and Hiring a Good Copywriter

By Walter Burek

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A search on Google™ for "copywriter" will turn up no less than 174,000 names. Writers who call themselves copywriters may be plentiful, but real copywriters who are good are hard to find.

Ernest Hemingway and George Bernard Shaw tried it and decided they couldn't do it. John Marquand and Stephen Vincent Benet gave up almost as quickly as they started. Aldous Huxley said it was "easier to write a passable sonnet than a passable advertisement." And the lore of the advertising business is filled with tales of other successful novelists, journalists, playwrights and poets who have tried their hand at advertising copy and failed.

Writing good advertising is difficult. And finding a good copywriter is equally hard. But not impossible, if you know what to look for. Here are seven things to keep in mind the next time you need the right copywriter to write that ad, brochure or Web site...

1. Take a look at talent.

Writing advertising copy is a specialized skill. One that requires the ability to stop readers, listeners or viewers cold — and then move them to action: to buy, order, or find out more about a product or service. You can get a pretty good feel for how good a writer is at this by looking at his or her portfolio. If there's nothing there that stops you or interests you, look elsewhere. Most good copywriters these days have a Web site that includes samples of their work, or they will be happy to e-mail you a few electronic files of their ads and brochures.

2. Take experience into account.

But don't worry about experience in your industry. The best copywriters are almost always writers whose varied experience has helped them become genuine generalists. They can write compelling copy just as well for a piece of industrial hardware as they can for the latest frozen entrée. And their experience has taught them how to dive into any business, draw out the key benefits of its product and services, and present them in a new light.

3. Look for real interest.

A real pro will show a real interest in your project and in your business, right from the get-go. He'll ask questions about your target audience, your message, and what type of response you'll want. A good copywriter thrives on information. So expect him to ask for material like your annual report, previous brochures or ads, research results, and business or marketing plans. Getting this info to your writer up front will not only help him do his best work, it will save you time and money.

4. Watch out for "ads-while-u-wait" offers.

Two things: Good copywriters are always in demand, so expect them to be busy with other projects when you call; and don't expect any really good copywriter to agree to knock out your brochure copy in a day or two. (Beware of the writer who blurts out headlines while you're still on the phone with him; it's a guarantee that you'll end up with piece of work filled with weak ideas and half-cooked copy.) A good copywriter demands the time he needs to think about your product and all its benefits and features, and to let his ideas and words simmer. And the most talented writers will want the time it takes for a rewrite or two. (On the other hand, when you really do need a something done in a rush, a writer you've developed a relationship with and who knows your business should be more than happy to step in and help you out.)

5. Ask for references.

A good copywriter will make it her business to understand your communications needs, will stay in budget, will meet deadlines, and will act professionally in client meetings. The best way to find out about all these things is to contact at least two of the writer's references. And any good copywriter should have a stack of them.

6. Be prepared to pay.

A good copywriter is expensive. But a cheap copywriter will almost always cost you more in the end, just like a cheap lawyer or a cheap plumber. You'll end up having to hire someone else to redo the job, doubling your loss of time and money.

Expect a good writer to charge from \$50 to \$150 per hour and up, or a day rate of \$500 to \$1200 and up. Flat project fees can range from \$3000-\$10,000 for a multi-ad magazine campaign or product launch to \$10,000-\$25,000 for a complete direct mail package. You'll pay in the higher range for a more experienced writer, or one with a particular expertise in a highly technical or specialized industry, i.e., pharmaceuticals.

7. Make human contact.

Spend a little time getting to know your copywriter. And give that person an opportunity to learn about you, not just your company and products. It's time well spent if you find someone you like and can develop a good working relationship with. The result will be top-quality work that will help your business prosper and a skilled, knowledgeable writer you can depend on for future projects.

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Walter is a professional advertising copywriter who writes, edits and publishes "Words @ Work", a FREE bimonthly newsletter of advice and information about writing that works. To view his award-winning portfolio and to subscribe visit <http://www.walterburek.com> . You may also subscribe via <mailto:WordsAtWork@comcast.net>

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