KILLER COPY
SECRETS

How To Write Profit-Pulling Copy In 8 Easy Steps

Legal Notice

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Killer Copy Secrets

Introduction

"A copywriter is a salesperson behind a typewriter."

A quote comes from Judith Charles, president of her own retail advertising agency, Judith K. Charles Creative Communication. And it's the best definition of the word copywriter I've ever heard. The biggest mistake you can make as a copywriter is to judge advertising as laypeople judge it. If you do, you'll end up as an artist or an entertainer—but not as a salesperson. And your copy will be wasting your client's time and money.

When ordinary folks talk about advertising, they talk about the ads or commercials that are the funniest, the most entertaining, or the most unusual or provocative. Geico commercials with the talking lizard, Budweiser's "real men of genius" radio spots, and the annual creative TV commercial extravaganza broadcast during the Super Bowl are the ads people point to and say, "I really like that!"

But the goal of advertising is not to be liked, to entertain, or to win advertising awards; it is to sell products. The advertiser, if he is smart, doesn't care whether people like his commercials or are entertained or amused by them. If they are, fine. But commercials are a means to an end, and the end is increased sales—and profits—for the advertiser.

This is a simple and obvious thing, but the majority of copywriters and advertising professionals seem to ignore it. They produce artful ads, stunningly beautiful catalogues, and commercials whose artistic quality rivals the finest feature films. However, just because an ad is pretty and pleasant to read doesn't necessarily mean it is persuading people to buy the product. Sometimes cheaply produced ads, written simply and directly without a lot of fluff, do the best job of selling.

Chapter 1: Headlines

Headlines are so important that a single word can impact a campaign dramatically. We've seen e-mail subject lines where a one word change increased click-throughs by 46%.

Open rates were nearly identical and the e-mail creative was exactly the same for both versions, but click-throughs went up by 46% in the second. If the ad was sent to 2,000,000 e-mails, the winning version would lead to 17,000+ more clicks, all from changing a single word. That's a measurable difference that significantly impacts the bottom line.

So why are headlines so important? It's because they're the first lines of your copy that customers read. They create an initial impression that either draws readers in or pushes them away. Even if the rest of the copy is amazing and would convince 3 out of 10 people to buy, if the headline puts them to sleep, only a fraction of the customers who would have bought something will read your copy and make a purchase.

The headline alone can make or break an ad, homepage, or e-mail subject line. It sets the tone for the rest of the copy. If the headline pulls readers in, you'll make more sales; if not, you'll be left wondering what happened.

And that's why we're devoting an entire chapter to headlines. By following the points in this chapter, you'll learn how to write attention-grabbing headlines that convert readers into buyers.

How To Write Attention Grabbing Headlines That Convert

If you hang around copywriting circles long enough, you're sure to read this rule at one point or another because most copywriter's view getting potential customers to continue reading as the number rule of headline writing. Convincing your customers to keep reading means the time or money you invest in your copy won't go to waste. So first, focus on writing a headline that pulls your customers in and compels them to read the first sentence.

Your Headline Should Be Unique

The first thing you want to consider is how to make your headline unique. If yours is just like everyone else's, then your company won't stand out. Your customers won't have any reason to think you're different than your competitors, which means they won't have any reason to buy from you than from someone else.

Today's consumers are savvier than customers of the past. They're used to being bombarded with commercial after commercial that says the same thing. We can all remember watching a commercial with lines like, "Buy now with three low payments of $24.95. That's right. Only $24.95 per month. If you buy today, you'll get a free carrot peeler valued at $19.95."

Businesses use commercials like this because they work, at least on a subset of customers, but many people are turned off by commercial wording they've heard over and over again. As soon as they hear, "Three equal payments of $24.95," they tune out waiting for something that seems more credible.

If you sound the same as everyone else, you're automatically going to put customers to sleep, but if you do something different, you'll stand out, your message will be refreshing, and you may delight your customers enough to get them to buy from you.

Your Headline Should Be Ultra Specific

In addition to being unique, your headline should be ultra-specific. It should provide enough information to let customers know whether or not the offer you're presenting is interesting to them. If your headline isn't specific enough, customers won't know whether or not what you're selling is something they're interested in.

Here's an example:

A while ago I visited a blog with this headline: "You'll Be Missed." I had no idea what it was about. Did the owner lose a family member? Did her dog pass away? Did something else terrible happen? I felt bad for her, but I had no idea what was going on.

When I clicked through, I found out it was a post about Steve Jobs. He had just passed away in the past couple of days, and the author was writing about how she would miss Mr. Jobs. It ended up being a well-written post, but as a reader, I had no idea what it was about until I clicked through to read.

In cases like this, it's much better to provide enough specific information to compel readers to continue reading than to write something "clever" that doesn't give readers adequate information to decide whether or not they're interested.

Your Headline Should Conveys A Sense Of Urgency

When possible, your headline should convey a sense of urgency. It should include something that compels readers to continue reading so they don't miss out. This isn't a rule that can always be used, but when it can, it works really well.

Here's an example:

This post ended up doing well on the KISSmetrics blog. It's titled "Are You Losing Sales by Giving Customers Too Many Choices?" So why was it so successful?

One of the reasons is that it conveys a sense of urgency. When business owners read it, automatically they think, "Hmmm... maybe I am losing sales. I need to read this article to find out." And then they click through to read. The urgency of losing sales compels them to read the post.

Whenever possible, it's good to write headlines that convey a sense of urgency to convince people to continue reading.

Your Headline Should Be Useful

This may be the most important tip of all. If your headline isn't useful and doesn't convey a benefit, then it may not give people a reason to continue on past the headline. People want to know what benefit they'll receive from reading what you've written.

This also happens to be one of the rules that companies break the most. They end up writing something clever because for some reason most people think that's the point of writing a headline. In doing so they fail to communicate a benefit and fail to give readers a reason to continue reading. Eventually, they end up with disappointing sales because no one pays attention to their copy. That's a mistake you don't want to make.

Chapter 2: Writing To Communicate

In an article published in the Harvard Business Review, Charles K. Ramond described experiments designed to measure advertising effectiveness. The experiments showed, not surprisingly, that advertising is most effective when it is easy to understand. In other words, you sell more merchandise when you write clear copy. In theory, it sounds easy. Advertising deals, for the most part, with simple subjects— clothing, soda, beer, soap, records. But in practice, many advertisements don't communicate as effectively as they could. So, how to communicate in a right way? Here's some tips for you.

Tips For Writing Clear Copy

Put the Reader First

Think of the reader. Ask yourself: Will the reader understand what I have written? Does he know the special terminology I have used? Does my copy tell her something important or new or useful? If I were the reader, would this copy persuade me to buy the product?

One technique to help you write for the reader is to address the reader directly as "you" in the copy, just as I am writing to you in this book. Copywriters call this the "you-orientation." Flip through a magazine, and you'll see that 90 percent of the ads contain the word "you" in the body copy.

Carefully Organize Your Selling Points

When you write your copy, you must carefully organize the points you want to make. In an ad, you might have one primary sales message ("This car gets good mileage") and several secondary messages ("roomy interior," "low price," "$500 rebate"). The headline states the main selling proposition, and the first few paragraphs expand on it. Secondary points are covered later in the body copy. If this copy is lengthy, each secondary point may get a separate heading or number. The organization of your

selling points depends on their relative importance, the amount of information you give the reader, and the type of copy you are writing (letter, ad, commercial, or news story).

Before you create an ad or mailer, write down your sales points. Organize them in a logical, persuasive, clear fashion. And present them in this order when you write your copy.

Break the Writing into Short Sections

If the content of your ad can be organized as a series of sales points, you can cover each point in a separate section of copy. This isn't necessary in short ads of 150 words or less. But as length increases, copy becomes more difficult to read. Breaking the text into several short sections makes it easier to read.

What's the best way to divide the text into sections? If you have a series of sections where one point follows logically from the previous point, or where the sales points are listed in order of importance, use numbers. If there is no particular order of importance or logical sequence between the sales points, use graphic devices such as bullets, asterisks, or dashes to set off each new section. If you have a lot of copy under each section, use subheads.

Paragraphs should also be kept short. Long, unbroken chunks of type intimidate readers. A page filled with a solid column of tiny type says, "This is going to be tough to read!" When you edit your copy, use subheads to separate major sections. Leave space between paragraphs. And break long paragraphs into short paragraphs. A paragraph of five sentences can usually be broken into two or three shorter paragraphs by finding places where a new thought or idea is introduced and beginning the new paragraph with that thought.

Use Short Sentences

Short sentences are easier to read than long sentences. All professional writers— newspaper reporters, publicists, magazine writers, copywriters— are taught to write in crisp, short, snappy sentences. Long sentences tire and puzzle your readers. By the time they have gotten to the end of a lengthy sentence, they don't remember what was at the beginning.

D. H. Menzel, co-author of Writing a Technical Paper, conducted a survey to find the best length for sentences in technical papers. He found that sentences became difficult to understand beyond a length of about 34 words. And the consumer has far less patience with wordiness and run-on sentences than does the scientist studying an important report.

Rudolf Flesch, best known for his books Why Johnny Can't Read and The Art of Plain Talk, says the best average sentence length for business writing is 14 to 16 words. Twenty to 25 words is passable, he adds, but above 40 words, the writing becomes unreadable.

Copy becomes dull when all sentences are the same length. To make your writing flow, vary sentence length. By writing an occasional short sentence or sentence fragment, you can reduce the average sentence length of your copy to an acceptable length even if you frequently use lengthy sentences. Train yourself to write in crisp, short sentences. When you have finished a thought, stop. Start the next sentence with a new thought. When you edit, your pencil should automatically seek out places where a long string of words can be broken in two.

Use Simple Words

Simple words communicate more effectively than big words. People use big words to impress others, but they rarely do. More often, big words annoy and distract the reader from what the writer is trying to say. Yet big words persist, because using pompous language makes the reader or speaker feel important.

In advertising copy, you are trying to communicate with people, not impress them or boost your own ego. Avoid pompous words and fancy phrases. Cecil Hoge, the mail-order expert, says the words in your copy should be "like the windows in a storefront. The reader should be able to see right through them and see the product."

Small words are better than big words whether you're writing to farmers or physicists, fishermen or financiers. "Even the best-educated people don't resent simple words," says John Caples. "But [simple words] are the only words many people understand." And don't think your copy will be ignored because you write in plain English. In Shakespeare's most famous sentence—"To be or not to be?"— the biggest word is three letters long.

Be Concise

Good copy is concise. Unnecessary words waste the reader's time, dilute the sales message, and take up space that could be put to better use. Rewriting is the key to producing concise copy. When you write your first draft, the words just flow, and you can't help being chatty. In the editing stage, unnecessary words are deleted to make the writing sparkle with vigour and clarity.

One copywriter I know describes her copy as a "velvet slide"—a smooth path leading the prospect from initial interest to final sale. Excess words are bumps and obstacles that block the slide. For example, a writing consultant's brochure informs me that his clients receive "informed editorial consideration of their work." As opposed to

uninformed? Delete informed. Another such brochure refers to "incomplete manuscripts still in progress." Obviously, a manuscript still in progress is incomplete.

Make your writing concise. Avoid redundancies, run-on sentences, wordy phrases, the passive voice, unnecessary adjectives, and other poor stylistic habits that take up space but add little to meaning or clarity. Edit your writing to remove unnecessary words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs.

Be Specific

Advertising persuades us by giving specific information about the product being advertised. The more facts you include in your copy, the better. Copywriters who don't bother to dig for specifics produce vague, weak, meaningless copy.

"If those who have studied the art of writing are in accord on any one point," write Strunk and White in The Elements of Style, "it is this: the surest way to arouse and hold the attention of the reader is by being specific, definite, and concrete. The greatest writers—Homer, Dante, Shakespeare —are effective largely because they deal in particulars and report the details that matter."

When you sit down at the PC, your file of background information should have at least twice as much material as you will end up using in the final version of your ad. When you have a warehouse of facts to choose from, writing copy is easy: You just select the most important facts and describe them in a clear, concise, direct fashion.

But when copywriters have little or nothing to say, they fall back on fancy phrases and puffed-up expressions to fill the empty space on the page. The words sound nice, but say nothing. And the ad doesn't sell because it doesn't inform.

Chapter 3: Secrets For Powerful Copy

Make People Feel Like They Belong

You may not have noticed it before, but most people want to feel like they belong to a group of some kind. Everyone, in some way or another, is looking for a group to belong to and that gives them a sense of community.

Universities in the U.S. are a great example. Attending a university makes you feel like you're part of a larger community. Everyone who attends becomes a "Longhorn" or a "Red Raider" or a "Titan." The longer you're there, the more you identify with the community. You start to wear the same shirts and say the same things like "Hook 'em horns" and "Wreck 'em Tech." You feel like you belong. You feel like you're part of a community.

Interestingly, the same thing happens with brands. People purchase a product, and then they feel like they're part of a community. They feel like they're part of a larger group who uses those products.

Mini Cooper owners, for example, are known for identifying with the larger Mini Cooper community. When you buy a Mini, you aren't just buying a car; you're joining a community of Mini owners.

Apple products are the same way. People continue to buy Apple products, not solely because they are superior to other products *(which is true in some cases and not in others)*, but because they become an Apple person. Their identity is tied to Apple. They can't buy a PC because all of their other products are from Apple.
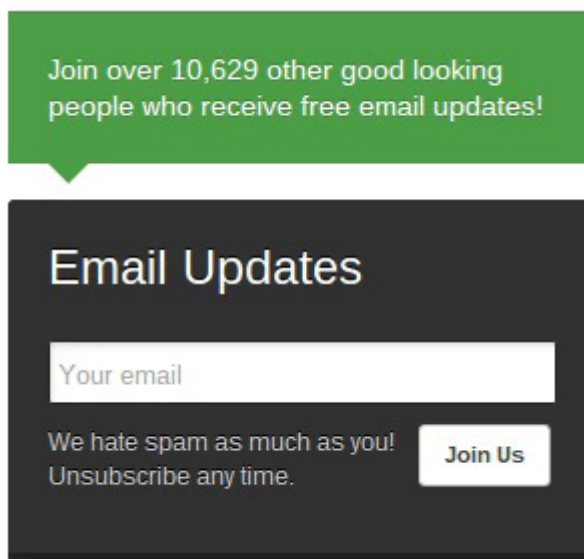
Whenever possible, you want to create a sense of community or belonging with your products. You want people to feel like they're a [enter your company name here] person and not a [enter your competition's name here] person.

So how do you do this? Here are some ways:

Ask People To Join

The first way is to use words like "join" or "become a member" on your website or sales material. This gives people a sense that they're joining something larger and won't just be carrying on by themselves.

Buffer does this on their blog. The copy above their sign-up form says "Join over 10,629 other good looking people who receive free e-mail updates."

Instead of using the standard wording to ask customers to sign up for an e-mail list like "Sign up to get free updates," they add a sense of community to signing up for e-mail updates. They also use "Join Us" for their call to action instead of a more standard "Sign Up Now" button.

We don't have any statistics on this, but it's our guess that they're using it because it's more effective.

Create A Community

Another way to generate a feeling of community is to create an actual community. Shocking, we know.

Copyblogger does this with their membership community. At the top of their page, they have a "Member Home" link which offers a community for people to be a part of.

Another option would have been to just create courses and offer them for students to take, which is one way to do what they do, but it doesn't create the same sense of belonging that a community provides.

So building a community is one way to give customers something to belong to.

Display Client/ Customer Logos

Another way to make your customers feel part of something is to display logos from your top clients or customers.

Here's why: the logos create a group of companies your clients can join. By signing up to use your service, customers can use the exact same service that [enter big company name here] uses. If the company logos you show are for industry leading organizations, then new customers can join the ranks of these leading organizations and use the exact same tools and services they're using to get ahead.

The internet is full of examples of companies displaying their clients' logos, so feel free to look around to get some ideas. Here are a few examples to start you off:

Switch Video

We've made over **417 videos** for **250+ companies** in **15 countries** and **10 different languages.**
Here are just a few of the awesome companies we've worked with.

facebook. ▪️▪️ Microsoft 🅗🅟 IBM ⊕ ⊐ Abbott NOKIA ▮▮ ↘ Edelman wundermon

CrazyEgg

50,000+ Businesses
and Entrepreneurs Trust Crazy
Egg

eBaY   Hilton

DELL   COSTCO
               WHOLESALE

amazon.com   Zappos

Y!   (intel)
YAHOO!

▲ Forrst   ◎ monster

Show Off Social Media Number

Still another way to create a sense of belonging is to show off your number of social media followers. By displaying a large number of followers, you're showing people that they're not the only ones using a product or service, and that they're joining a community of users by doing so.

Appliances Online from the UK does this on their homepage. They show that they have 1,209,622 Facebook fans *(as of the time this chapter was written)*. This gives customers a sense of community and shows that they're not the only ones to choose a certain product or service.

Create A Feeling Of Exclusivity

Another persuasion secret copywriters use is to create a feeling of exclusivity. The goal is to make prospects feel special by being part of an exclusive group.

This is one reason why phrases like "secrets" and "insider information" work so well. They make people feel like they're part of an inside group that knows information other people don't have.

It's also why companies frequently use phrases like "exclusive offers" or "become an insider." They want you to feel like you're part of a special, exclusive group by signing up.

We're suckered in because we like to feel like we're on the inside getting offers and information other people aren't getting. There's just something in our nature that makes us want to feel part of an exclusive group.

JCrew and Banana Republic both use this technique on their sign-up form copy for their e-mail newsletters. JCrew's says, "Like being first? Then get our "can't miss style news" before everybody else." Banana Republic's says, "Sign up for emails and be the first to hear about covetable new arrivals and exclusive promotions at Banana Republic."

Here's what their sign-up forms and links look like:

Prove The Value Of Your Product

The third persuasion secret is to prove the value of your product because customers nearly always want to get a good deal or at the very least feel like they're spending their money wisely.

So one of your main goals is to prove the value of your product. Your job is to show prospects why they'll be getting a good deal when they buy what you're selling.

The good news is that there are a few proven ways to do this.

First, you can make a comparison to a similar product or products. You can show prospective customers what they'll get with your product and what they'll receive if they purchase from the competition. This allows them to make a feature to feature comparison which they can then compare against the prices for each.

CrazyEgg uses this on the homepage to show what you receive by using CrazyEgg, ClickTale, and Google Analytics. Here's what it looks like:

Crazy Egg vs. Clicktale vs. Google Analytics

we offer all of the features below	CRAZY EGG	CLICKTALE	GOOGLE ANALYTICS
Heatmap	✓	✓	
Confetti	✓		
Overlay	✓	✓	✓
Scrollmap	✓	✓	
Version Testing	✓		
1 Click Sharing	✓		
Scheduled Reports	✓		
Multiple Link Tracking	✓	✓	✓

Another way to prove the value of your product is to compare it to something similar that isn't a direct competitor. This provides a different benchmark against which customers can compare the value of your product.

Digital Telepathy, for example, does this on their "Hire Us" page. The price for their service is $20,000, which is a lot of money, but not when you compare it to hiring and managing your own team of designers and developers.

ARE WE A GOOD FIT FOR YOUR PROJECT?

Our service starts at $20,000/month. Compared to hiring your own internal team, you get a lot of bang for your buck. We take a comprehensive approach to increasing the performance of your online business.

With one sentence Digital Telepathy proves the value of their service by comparing it with hiring in-house designers and developers. That makes $20,000 seem like a bargain compared with paying salary and benefits of an in-house design team.

CrazyEgg also does this kind of comparison with their homepage headline. It reads as follows:

The Astonishing Power of Eye Tracking Technology...Without the High Costs

In this headline, they compare heat maps with eye-tracking technology. The former is a significant bargain compared to the thousands of dollars that eye-tracking technology costs. This headline helped to show the real value of using CrazyEgg and assisted in increasing conversion rates by 30%.

Ultimately, the goal is to show your customers that they're spending their money wisely while changing the conversation going on in their head. You want them to debate whether they should pay for your product over the competition and not whether or not they want to pay $X for your product.

Establish Yourself As An Authority

Are you an authority in your field? What about someone on your staff? Are they an authority in the subject matter you work with?

If yes, you should use some of your copy to establish yourself as an authority because people have a tendency to look up to experts in any given field. The more authoritative you seem, the more seriously your customers will take whatever you have to say.

Here are a few ways your company can establish itself as an authority:

Highly Trained Staff

Does someone on your staff have a PHd or are they highly trained in your field? If yes, that's one way to establish your authority.

Cream.hr is a great example of this. One of their co-founders, Dr. Jordan B. Peterson, is a clinical psychologist who has done a lot of research with modern personality tests. He's also taught as an Assistant and Associate Professor at Harvard, which is quite impressive.

Since Cream's company is based on personality tests that evaluate potential employees, it makes sense to emphasize Dr. Peterson as an authority in clinical psychology in order to gain more credibility with potential customers. They do this on their About page with a detailed bio of Dr. Peterson.
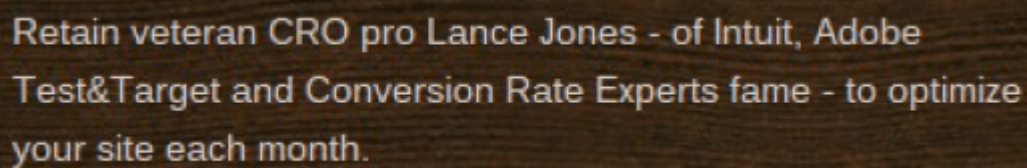
Experienced Staff Members

Another way to establish authority is to highlight the experience of your team members.

For example, have any of your employees worked in an industry for a long period of time or worked for top companies within the industry? Both can be used to establish authority.

This is a technique that's used a lot. You'll frequently see signs that say things like "15 years of experience as a tax accountant" or "25 years of experience as a trial lawyer."

Copy Hacker does this on one of their sales pages. They describe one of their consultants, Lance Jones, in this way:

Retain veteran CRO pro Lance Jones - of Intuit, Adobe Test&Target and Conversion Rate Experts fame - to optimize your site each month.

This short segment of copy helps to establish Lance Jones as an authority in CRO which in turn establishes Copy Hackers as an authority since he's one of the co-founders.

Company History

Another oft-used way to establish your business as an authority is to stress the number of years it's been in business. Companies frequently use phrases like "established in 1941" or "Serving our customers for over 100 years."

John Deere, for example, is an iconic American business and has been around for over 175 years, but you can't find that stat on their homepage *(although they probably use it elsewhere)*. It would make sense to display copy such as this: "We've been proudly building farm products for over 175 years" *(or something along those lines)*.

These are three easy ways to establish your company as an authority in its field.

Provide "Reasons Why"

Providing "reasons why" is another way to write powerful copy that convinces prospects to buy.

Robert Cialdini, a Professor Emeritus of Psychology and Marketing at Arizona State University, is famous among copywriters for his book Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion. It's had a significant impact on how copy is written.

He also talks about the effectiveness of giving people a reason why when we ask them to do things. Here's what he has to say about that:

A well-known principle of behaviour says that when we ask someone to do us a favour we will be more successful if provide a reason. People simply like to have reasons for what they do.

He goes on to discuss a study where participants were asked to cut in line to make copies at a Xerox machine based on one of three scenarios.

- *Scenario 1: The participants were instructed to cut in line and to say, "Excuse me, I have 5 pages. May I use the Xerox machine."*

- *Scenario 2: In the second scenario, the participants were instructed to provide a reason for cutting by saying, "I have 5 pages. May I use the Xerox machine because I am in a rush."*

- *Scenario 3: In scenario three, the participants were instructed to provide a nearly meaningless reason for cutting by saying, "Excuse me, I have 5 pages. May I use the Xerox machine because I have to make copies."*

Which do you think was the most effective?

Not surprisingly, the second scenario led to the best results. 60% of people allowed the participant to cut in scenario one while 94% allowed the participant to cut in scenario two. That's an increase of 34%.

But it gets really interesting in scenario three. Even though a nearly meaningless reason was provided, 93% of people still allowed the participant to cut, which is only 1% less than when an actual reason was given.

The conclusion from these results is that people are conditioned to comply more frequently when a reason is given, even if the reason is basically meaningless. The fact that a reason is provided is enough to convince more people to comply with what you ask.

Chapter 4: Techniques For Profitable Advertising Ideas

The copywriter's job is to come up with words and ideas that sell the product or service being advertised. Where do these ideas come from? They come from an understanding of the product, the market, and the mission of the copy—which is to generate sales. However, even the best copywriters get stuck for ideas at times. Here is a proven 9-step procedure you can follow to come up with ideas for ads, headlines, marketing campaigns, or anything else under the sun:

Identify the Problem

The first step in solving a problem is to know what the problem is. But many of us forge ahead without knowing what it is we are trying to accomplish. Moral: Don't apply a solution before you have taken the time to accurately define the problem.

Assemble Pertinent Facts

In crime stories, detectives spend most of their time looking for clues. They cannot solve a case with clever thinking alone; they must have the facts. You, too, must have the facts before you can solve a problem or make an informed decision.

Professionals in every field know the importance of gathering specific facts. A scientist planning an experiment checks the abstracts to see what similar experiments have been performed. An author writing a book collects everything he can on the subject: newspaper clippings, photos, official records, transcripts of interviews, diaries, magazine articles, and so on. A consultant may spend weeks or months digging around a company before coming up with a solution to a major problem.

Keep an organized file of the background material you collect on a project. Review the file before you begin to formulate your solution. Use your PC to take notes on your research materials. This step increases your familiarity with the background

information, and can give you a fresh perspective on the problem. Also, when you type up notes you condense a mound of material into a few neat pages that show all the facts at a glance.

Gather General Knowledge

In copywriting, specific facts have to do with the project at hand. They include the product, the market, the competition, and the media. General knowledge has to do with the expertise you've developed in business and in life, and includes your storehouse of information concerning life, events, people, science, technology, management, and the world at large. Become a student in the many areas that relate to your job. Trade journals are the most valuable source of industry knowledge. Subscribe to the journals that relate to your field. Scan them all, and clip and save articles that contain information that may be useful to you. Organize your clipping files for easy access to articles by subject. Read books in your field and start a reference library.

If a copywriter with twenty-five years of experience writes a book on radio advertising, and you buy the book, you can learn in a day or so of reading what it took him twenty years to accumulate. Take some night school courses. Attend seminars, conferences, trade shows. Make friends with people in your field and exchange information, stories, ideas, case histories, technical tips. Most of the successful professionals I know are compulsive information collectors. You should be one, too.

Look for Combinations

It has been said more than once, "There's nothing new in the world. It's all been done before." Maybe. But an idea doesn't have to be something completely new. Many ideas are simply a new combination of existing elements. By looking for combinations, for new relationships between old ideas, you can come up with a fresh approach. The clock radio, for example, was invented by someone who combined two existing technologies: the clock and the radio. Niels Bohr combined two separate ideas—Rutherford's model of the atom as a nucleus orbited by electrons and Planck's quantum theory—to create the modern conception of the atom. Look for synergistic combinations when you examine the facts. What two things can work together to form a third thing that is a new idea? If you have two devices, and each performs a function you need, can you link them together to create a new product?

Sleep on It

Putting the problem aside for a time can help you renew your idea-producing powers just when you think your creative well has run dry. But don't resort to this method after only five minutes of puzzled thought.

First, you have to gather all the information you can. Next, you need to go over the information again and again as you try to come up with that one big idea. You'll come to a point where you get bleary and punch-drunk, just hashing the same ideas over and over. This is the time to take a break, put the problem aside, sleep on it, and let your unconscious mind take over.

A solution may strike you as you sleep, shower, shave, or walk in the park. Even if it doesn't, when you return to the problem, you will find you can attack it with renewed vigour and a fresh perspective. I use this technique in writing—I put aside what I have written and read it fresh the next day. Many times the things I thought were brilliant when I wrote them can be much improved at second glance.

Use a Checklist

Checklists can be used to stimulate creative thinking and as a starting point for new ideas. There are several checklists in this book you can use. But the best checklists are those you create yourself, because they are tailored to the problems that come up in your daily routine.

For example, Jill is a technical salesperson well versed in the technical features of her product, but she has trouble when it comes to closing a sale. She could overcome this weakness by making a checklist of typical customer objections and how to answer them. (The list of objections can be culled from sales calls made over the course of several weeks. Possible tactics for overcoming these objections can be garnered from fellow salespeople, from books on selling, and from her own trial-and-error efforts.)

Then, when faced with a tough customer, she doesn't have to reinvent the wheel, but will be prepared for all the standard objections because of her familiarity with the checklist. However, no checklist can contain an idea for every situation that comes up. Remember, a checklist should be used as a tool for creative thinking, not as a crutch.

Get Feedback

Sherlock Holmes was a brilliant detective. But even he needed to bounce ideas off Dr. Watson at times. As a professional writer, I think I know how to write an engaging piece of copy. Some people prefer to work alone. I'm one of them, and maybe you are, too. But if you don't work as part of a team, getting someone else's opinion of your work can help you focus your thinking and produce ideas you hadn't thought of.

Take the feedback for what it's worth. If you feel you're right, and the criticisms are off base, ignore them. But more often than not, feedback will provide useful information that can help you come up with the best, most profitable ideas. Of course, if you ask others to "take a look at this report," you should be willing to do

the same for them when they solicit your opinion. You'll find that reviewing the work of others is fun; it's easier to critique someone else's work than create your own. And you'll be gratified by the improvements you come up with—things that are obvious to you but would never have occurred to the other person.

Team Up

Some people think more creatively when working in groups. But how large should the group be? My opinion is that two is the ideal team. Any more and you're in danger of ending up with a committee that spins its wheels and accomplishes nothing. The person you team up with should have skills and thought processes that balance and complement your own.

For example, in advertising, copywriters (the word people) team up with art directors (the picture people). In entrepreneurial firms, the idea person who started the company will often hire a professional manager from one of the Fortune 500 companies as the new venture grows; the entrepreneur knows how to make things happen, but the manager knows how to run a profitable, efficient corporation. As an engineer, you may invent a better microchip. But if you want to make a fortune selling it, you should team up with someone who has a strong sales and marketing background.

Give New Ideas a Chance

Many businesspeople, especially managerial types, develop their critical faculties more finely than their creative faculties. If creative engineers and inventors had listened to these people, we would not have personal computers, cars, airplanes, lightbulbs, or electricity. The creative process works in two stages.

The first is the idea-producing stage, when ideas flow freely. The second is the critical or "editing" stage, where you hold each idea up to the cold light of day and see if it is practical. Many of us make the mistake of mixing the stages together, especially during the idea-producing stage, when we are too eager to criticize an idea as soon as it is presented.

As a result, we shoot down ideas and make snap judgments when we should be encouraging the production of ideas. Avoid making this mistake, as many good ideas are killed this way. The tasks and procedures outlined in this chapter may seem like a tall order. But don't worry. You can do it. Heed this advice from Lou Redmond, a former Ogilvy & Mather copywriter: "Advertising is one of the minor arts, so don't be intimidated by it."

Chapter 5: How To Close Deal With Your Copy

This question is important because you can end up writing excellent copy that gets your customers attention, draws them in, and then pulls them down a slippery slope to the end of your copy, but if you don't know how to close the deal, all of your hard work will be to no avail.

In sales terms this is known as asking for the sale. Every salesman worth his salt knows that at some point you have to ask the customer to buy what you're selling. If you talk too much, you can talk yourself out of a sale, and if you don't ask customers whether or not they're ready to buy, they may never decide to make a purchase.

An important step in any sales transaction is getting to the point where you ask for the sale. It can be as simple as saying something like, "Which option would you like to go with for your first purchase?" or "How many would you like to order today?"

This takes place in a regular, face-to-face sales transaction and is known as asking for the sale. When it comes to copy, there's something similar — a call to action.

Call To Action

A call to action is very similar to asking for the sale but in print form. You've also likely seen it in one of many ways.

On a sales letter, you may have read a line like, "Order your copies today!" On a website, you may have read, *"Start Your Free Trial Now!"*

Both of these are examples of calls to action. So what are they?

A call to action is a simple command that directs customers to take some sort of action, whether it be to buy, sign up, or start a free trial. At this point, however, you may be asking another question: "Why are they needed?"

The reason they're needed is that they've been proven as the best way to compel prospects to take action. Even though they may seem direct or potentially smarmy,

simple, direct, and clear calls to action are proven to be the most effective way to get your customers to act.

Another option would be to ask customers to take action. You can say something like, "Would you like to sign up now?" or "Are you ready to sign up for our service?" Both are valid ways to ask for a sale, but neither are as effective as a direct command when it comes to copy.

Whatever the reason, it's been proven that calls to action are the most effective way to get customers to take the next step in print and online copy.

Creating A Sense Of Urgency

In addition to using a clear call to action, you also want to create a sense of urgency with your copy.

Often, customers are close to making a purchase, but they're not quite ready to hand over their money. They're nearly convinced, but they're not quite ready to buy.

One technique used by marketers the world over is to create a sense of urgency which compels prospects to take action. Some simple ways to do this are by using copy like "buy now" or "order today."

Both of these short phrases use either "now" or "today" to create a sense of urgency. They're both subtle, but they help to compel customers to take action.

Another strategy is to find a way to provide a real reason why customers shouldn't wait to take action. These reasons include limited quantities and limited time offers.

Have you noticed how clothing stores always have sales during holidays? They advertise with copy like this:

Macy's Labour Day Sale: Get up to 50% off this weekend only!

Providing limited time offers is one way to create a feeling of urgency.

Another way is by selling limited quantities, either because the quantities are in fact limited or because you restrict quantities on purpose *(although you should never lie about limited quantities to increase demand because that would be unethical)*. Copy examples include:

- *Get 50% off while supplies last!*

- *Limited quantities available! Buy now!*

- *Limited edition dinnerware. Only 1000 sets ever made!*

- *Free popcorn for the first 100 customers!*

- *Limited-time offer! Buy now!*

All of these examples reveal ways to communicate limited quantities or availability in order to compel customers to take action, and if your product or service is in fact limited in some way, it's an excellent way to push some customers over the fence who may already be sold but may need a little extra prodding to immediately take action.

Make A Compelling Offer

Another important part of the copywriting process is making a compelling offer. Not only do you need to write persuasive copy that effectively presents your product and clearly communicates the benefits of using it, but you also need to create the most compelling offer possible.

For example, if you're selling alarm systems for homes, you can advertise your service with copy like this:

Protect Your Home before It's Too Late

Get a top-of-the-line alarm system installed in your home to protect your loved ones and valuable possessions.

Most people fail to get an alarm system until it's too late. Don't make that mistake.

Homeowners lose an average of $1675 per burglary, not to mention the lost sense of security and the potential danger for family members, but it doesn't have to be this way.

An alarm system decreases the likelihood a burglar will target your home. You'll also receive discounts on your homeowners insurance from most insurers.

Protect your home with an alarm system from A1 Alarms. Call to learn how you can get your home protected starting this week.

This copy is pretty good, but it could be even better. Can you tell how? Yes, it's by sweetening the deal and making an offer your customers can't refuse. Here's some add-on copy that does the trick:

Act today and get free installation valued at $850. That's right. All installations during the month of September come with free installation. Save $850 on your home protection system from A1 Alarms by calling today!

Do you notice a difference? Free installation was added to make the offer more compelling. It's a tactic companies use frequently with copy such as:

- *Order today and get free shipping.*

- *Free shipping on orders over $50.*

- *Free installation included with all premium packages.*

- *Purchase a TV + internet bundle today and receive a $300 gift card.*

- *Order now and get a free carrot peeler valued at $19.95.*

All of these copy examples provide something to make the offer more compelling. Potential deal sweeteners include bonus materials, free shipping, free installation, and much, much more.

The question when it comes to your copy is this: How can you make the offer more compelling? What can you do to make what you're selling more attractive to your customers? Can you include bonus features or free shipping? What about a risk-free 30 or 60 day trial? Is there anything you can do to make your offer more compelling?

Don't Forget A Guarantee

Another copywriting staple is the tried and true guarantee. Thousands of companies provide guarantees for their products.

But they're kind of interesting when you stop and think about it.

Nearly every product has a guarantee or warranty. You commonly see copy like this:

- *Try risk-free for 30 days.*

- *If you're not completely satisfied, we'll give your money back. No questions asked.*

- *1 year limited warranty.*

- *Return within 90 days for a full refund.*

All of these options make the purchase seem less risky. They also instil more confidence in the product. If a company's willing to guarantee it for 5 or 10 years, it must be pretty good. And if they're willing to give your money back in 90 days if you're not completely satisfied, then there's no risk to making the purchase.

But how often do customers take advantage of these warranties or guarantees? Not very often.

A 30-day money back guarantee increased sales by 21% and only 12% of people asked for their money back. With a hypothetical number of 100 traffic systems sold per month, the monthly revenue would be $19,700 per month without the guarantee and $23,837 per month with the guarantee but before refunds. After needing to give money back to the 12% of customers who asked for it, revenues would go down to $20,976. This lead to a final revenue increase of 24%.

Outro

Some copywriters try to add to their value in the marketplace by taking on a second skill. There are copywriter-photographers, copywriter–art directors, copywriter-narrators, and copywriter–television producers. The logic makes sense. By hiring the dual-function copywriter, the client gets two services for the price of one. In reality, the best copywriters are those who write copy exclusively. People who do two jobs are usually not very good at either one. I know of only one or two exceptions, if that. For example, all the copywriter-photographers I know are mediocre writers and mediocre photographers. The reason may be that a skilled writer is so in demand that he has no time for picture taking, just as a skilled photographer commands such high fees that there is no need to develop a secondary talent.

Successful copywriters—at least, the ones I know—are good at visualizing their ideas, but their visual concepts and layouts are always simple in design. The reason may be that copywriters don't have the drawing skills needed to express complex visual concepts on paper. So they stick to layouts they can illustrate with stick figures and squiggly lines.

Words, not pictures, are the most important way of communicating great ideas.