

Copywriting for beginners

by Amy Kurland

When writing marketing materials for your business, the goal should be to sell your product. This doesn't mean your copy needs to be loud and pushy like a stereotypical used car salesman. But there should definitely be a strategy behind your approach. Simply put, copywriting is sales writing—and it needs strategy to be effective.

Many entrepreneurs, when sitting down to write their own marketing copy, describe their product in depth, believing that if they give enough information about the product it will simply sell itself. The truth is, the writer needs to be very selective about the information they present. But that's only half of the story. The other half is about *how* you present this information to the reader. Below are six tips designed to help you do both of the above effectively—and write copy that sells.

1. Stress benefits.

There are two ways to describe a product—in terms of features and in terms of benefits. A feature is simply a description of something. A benefit answers the question, "What's in it for me?" The key to good sales writing is to emphasize benefits in your copy. For example, if you were writing a brochure on index cards, you could simply write, "Our cards come in five different colors." (Feature). But much more effective is the benefit-oriented version: "Our multi-colored cards allow you to color code items in order of priority."

2. It's all about the reader.

When companies write their own marketing collateral without the help of a professional copywriter, often the first instinct is to write all about the company. Effective copywriting can include company description to some degree, but the focus of the copy should always be on the reader—on their needs and the benefits they'll receive by using the product.

3. Speak directly to your reader.

Without knowing better, people often write advertising and marketing collateral using the third person. But the third person is distancing. Using "you" creates a more personal relationship, which is what you want in order to gain trust and keep your reader interested. Just look at the difference between the following two phrases: "That means saved time for our clients," vs. "That means saved time for you and your family."

4. Lay out the problem, then offer a solution.

When you begin writing, first address your readers' challenges and emotional needs, then let them know how your product will help solve these issues. Once you've empathized with their needs and they realize that you "get it," they'll be more likely to absorb your sales message because they'll identify with it and trust you more.

5. Forget what you learned in school.

Academic writing is what most of us automatically default to when we write. To hook and maintain your reader's interest, however, your writing has to be lively. Engaging. Conversational. This means taking liberties with style and even breaking grammatical rules. Like starting sentences with prepositions. Using phrases for sentences. And using contractions like "you're" and "you'd."

6. Write concisely.

When writing marketing materials, your point is usually amplified when there are less words to distract from it. So pare down your sentences by ridding them of unnecessary words and phrases. Your hurried reader will thank you for it by reading the rest of what you wrote.

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