

Expert Series

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Mastering your copy

10 old fashioned tips that will make your words work harder for you

Masterful use of copy is more important than ever because of the clutter that's all around us. These 10 pointers may help you create more stopping power with your promotional texts.

1. Know your USP

Before you begin writing you must be clear about your Unique Selling Proposition – that one line statement that explains why the prospect should buy. You must have an intimate knowledge of your basic offer before you can begin to persuade anyone to accept it.

2. Cutting

There is no need for 'a general principle' where 'a principle' will do nicely. Not too many women look for a 'feminine hair product for women'. 'Feminine hair product' is just fine. And we don't need to say that the radio blared loudly. You don't usually get one to blare softly. A simple technique for improving your writing is this: get rid of any words you don't need.

3. Appropriate words

Use strong verbs as much as possible and nouns but avoid modifiers ('the conference was somewhat engaging and rather inspiring' – well that's lovely for you, but 'somewhat' and 'rather' don't convince me).

4. Voice

A mail campaign for a KPMG service is going to have a different tone from a promotional email for Virgin Blue. Make sure you get it right.

5. Look out for the look

All writing is visual. It catches the eye before it has a chance to catch the brain. If you think about this truth, you immediately realise how important it is to use white space. And page layout. If your writing does not look good, you usually don't get to first base. The look of the page is certainly worthy of your attention.

6. Create a riveting and relevant headline

Which tells you more? Which is more engaging?

- My summer vacation
- The highs and lows of my summer on the road in country NSW

The headline needs to be a standalone statement that stops the scanner and strongly encourages the reader to read on.

7. Use the words your prospects use

You can't spend too much time getting to know your prospects. And don't speak to them from on high. Reach them on their level and connect with them by using the language they use. You are not writing to impress, you are writing to communicate.

8. Remember all selling is emotional

People buy for emotional reasons. The copywriter has to include the rational as well, but the emotional is all important. And there is emotion in everything. The writer must find it. "When you attend this workshop, you'll feel so much more confident about doing your job."

9. Ask for the order

Make it very clear. What exactly do you want the prospects to do? If you want them to buy, tell them and give them the specific steps involved – "complete the coupon with your credit card details, sign it, and send it back to us in the reply paid envelope." If you want people to contact you, clearly present your contact details and say, 'contact us now.'

10. Be sincere and tell the truth

People are sceptical today so don't make a claim unless you can prove it. And don't pad your copy with fluff or half truths. Avis went to No 1 many years ago with the tag line 'we try harder'. People responded because there was no outlandish claim.

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