

10 Keys to Copy That Sells!

by Alexandria K. Brown, “The E-zine Queen”

Whether you’re selling a product or service, the 10 tips below are your keys to writing great copy that communicates and persuades ... to get results! These guidelines can apply to most any form of consumer marketing communications: sales letters, brochures, web copy, or direct mail. As long as your goal is to elicit a reaction from your reader, you’ve come to the right place.

1. Be reader-centered, not writer-centered.

Many ads, brochures, and Web sites we see talk endlessly on and on about how great their products and companies are. Hello? Customer, anyone? Think of your reader thinking, “What’s in it for me?” If you can, talk with some of your current customers and ask them 1) why they chose you, and 2) what they get out of your product or service. TIP: To instantly make your copy more reader-focused, insert the word “you” often.

2. Focus on the benefits — not just the features.

The fact that your product or service offers a lot of neat features is great, but what do they DO for your customer? Do they save her time or money? Give her peace of mind? Raise her image to a certain status? Here’s an example: If you go buy a pair of Gucci sunglasses, you’re not just looking for good UV protection. You’re buying the sleek, stylish Gucci look. So that’s what Gucci sells. You don’t see their ads talk about how well made their sunglasses are. Think end results. Now, what does an insurance broker sell? Policies? No — peace of mind. (See? You’ve got it.)

3. Draw them in with a killer headline.

The first thing your reader sees can mean the difference between success and failure. Today’s ads are chock full of clever headlines that play on words. They’re cute, but most of them aren’t effective. There are many ways to get attention in a headline, but it’s safest to appeal to your reader’s interests and concerns. And again, remember to make it reader centered — no one gives a hoot about your company.

Bad: “SuccessCorp Creates Amazing New Financial Program”

Better: “Turn Your Finances Around in 30 Days!”

4. Use engaging subheads.

Like mini-headlines, subheads help readers quickly understand your main points by making the copy “skimmable.” Because subheads catch readers’ eyes, you should use them to your benefit! Read through your copy for your main promotional points, then summarize the ideas as subheads. To make your subheads engaging, it’s important to include action or selling elements. Bad: “Our Department’s Successes.” Better: “Meet Five Clients Who Saved \$10K With Us.”

5. Be conversational.

Write to your customers like you’d talk to them. Don’t be afraid of using conversational phrases such as “So what’s next?” or “Here’s how do we do this.” Avoid formality and use short, easy words. Why? Even if you think it can’t possibly be misunderstood, a few people still won’t get it.

6. Nix the jargon.

Avoid industry jargon and buzzwords — stick to the facts and the benefits. An easy way to weed out jargon is to think of dear old Mom reading your copy. Would she get it? If not, clarify and simplify. (This rule, of course, varies, depending on who your target audience is. For a business audience, you should upscale your words to what they're used to. In these cases buzzwords are often crucial. Just make sure your points don't get muddled in them!)

7. Keep it brief and digestible.

No one has time to weed through lengthy prose these days. The faster you convey your product or service's benefits to the reader, the more likely you'll keep her reading. Fire your "biggest gun" first by beginning with your biggest benefit — if you put it toward the end of your copy, you risk losing the reader before she gets to it. Aim for sentence lengths of less than 20 words. When possible, break up copy with subheads (see no. 4), bullets, numbers, or em dashes (like the one following this phrase) — these make your points easy to digest.

8. Use testimonials when possible.

Let your prospects know they won't be the first to try you. Give results-oriented testimonials from customers who have benefited immensely from your product or service. Oh, and never give people's initials only — it reminds me of those ads in the back of magazines with headlines like "Lose 50 Pounds in Three Days!" Give people's full names with their titles and companies (or towns and states of residence) — and be sure to get their permission first.

9. Ask for the order!

Tell your reader what you want her to do — don't leave her hanging. Do you want her to call you or e-mail you for more information? Order now? Call to schedule a free consultation? Complete a brief survey? Think about what you'd most like her to do, and then ask her. It's amazing how many marketing materials I come across every day that don't make it clear what the reader should do. If you wrote interesting copy, your reader may forget you're trying to sell something. Tell her what to do, and she'll be more likely to do it.

10. Have your copy proofread!

Good. Now have it proofread again. Don't risk printing any typos, misspellings, or grammatical mistakes that will represent your company as amateurish. Hire a professional editor/proofreader to clean up your work and double-check your grammar. Remember, you only get one chance to make a first impression! Oops — *impression*.

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Alexandria K. Brown, "The E-zine Queen," is author of the award-winning manual, "Boost Business With Your Own E-zine." To learn more about her book and sign up for more FREE tips like these, visit her site at <http://www.ezinequeen.com>.