

Copywriting

Pictures tell a thousand words. True enough! But overlooking the benefit of good copy can have dire consequences for the effect of any campaign, advert, website or brochure.

The construction of sentences that captivate an audience is an art.

Writing words that sell is an art form!

It is estimated that the average person is hit with over 3,000 advertising messages every day. That's an awful lot to take in – which is why we don't. Think about it! What ad can you remember seeing or hearing over the past 24 hours? What did it say?

The chances are that whatever it said, it was brief. And here's lesson number one; brevity.

Lets say you need to write a description of a product that's going to be used on an advert. First write everything you feel that needs to be said. Then, read through it, underlining the features that will encourage someone to buy it – things not found on other products, that sort of thing.

Re-write it removing the bits not underlined. Then, list out the key selling points in rank order of likely effect. Lets say you end up with 10 points.

Ditch numbers 4 to 7 and re-write the copy.

Nearly there.

Finally, replace the elongated words with more simplistic examples, or – for the sake of example – replace big words with little ones.

What you're left with should be a single paragraph of killer copy. Well, nearly!

TONE AND STYLE

The way in which copy is written needs to reflect the target market. If you're going after the younger customer then the copy can be hip, dynamic, left-field, right on....If it's the grey sector, then it needs to be a little restrained, considered – adult even.

The copy also needs to reflect the business or specifically, its brand. The way in which Virgin Atlantic describes its flights to the US is very different to the style adopted by British Airways selling much the same service.

STRAPLINES

Combined with a cracking image, the Strapline is what gets ads noticed. The rule here is simple. Short and simple.

Technically speaking, straplines should use “Saxon” words rather than “Latin” words. For example:

Latin	Saxon
Inexpensive	Cheap
Financial	Money
Sumptuous	Luxury

Words used should be understood without the reader having to physically read and construct them.

Remember the ad I asked you to recall from the past 24 hours? Bet it featured a quick, short strapline!

THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

The great thing about copywriting for marketing is that you can have some real fun with the English Language. You can make up new words, deliberately misspell others and do away with many of the rules we were all taught at school.

The art is knowing when and where you can use this new found freedom. For example, you couldn't get away with: “we also provide excellent printing to.” in a company brochure (it should be “too.”) But you could use “Specialzest” providing the typographical emphasis was on the “zest”.

Grammar though, is one area that shouldn't be tampered with. An incorrectly placed apostrophe or missing exclamation mark can have dire consequences. For example;

“Free cars, air-freshener and duster with every bottle of auto-wax”

Thus implying the purchaser of the wax will receive a free duster, air-freshener and some cars. Sounds like a good deal to me! However, what it should read is;

“FREE! Car's air-freshener and duster with every bottle of auto-wax”

Not quite as good a deal but you see the point.
Another common example is this:

“We sell CD's”

You sell CD's what?

The apostrophe here is used because it's believed CD, being an abbreviation of Compact Disc, requires notification that something's missing – in the same way that the apostrophe in “don't” signifies that the “o” is missing from the words “do not”.

On that basis, the correct use would be: C'D'S – which of course is just plain silly.

Apostrophes are also used to signify possession. So, you could use the example above correctly if the phrase was “The CD's box is damaged”. The box belongs to the CD.

We all know what a CD is – it's an accepted term of abbreviation so we don't need to signify that something's missing. If we're selling lots of them, then it's simply a case of adding an “s” to indicate the plural aspect of the offer;

“We sell CDs”

Simple!

And it's also worth remembering that the English Language is constantly developing. You'll have noticed that I started the previous sentence with the word “and” – something my English teacher would have given me detention for. Yet, it is now officially accepted by the Oxford Centre for Correct English. You can even place a comma in before “and” as well, and the same applies to the word “but”.

But before you start spelling colour without a ‘u’, specialise with a ‘z’ and putting ‘and’ in weird places, it's worth going back to your target market and considering if this new approach to the English language is going to sit well with them. If not, keep it traditional.

THE PAGE DIFFERENCE

The need for quality, professional copy really cannot be stressed enough. At Page, we have an excellent, in-house copywriting service as well as a portfolio of specialist writers in specific fields including medical, financial, education and government.

Using this service means that we can write copy directly into the design, experimenting with how different words not only read, but also appear. It ensures that neither the copy nor design is compromised and leads to far more effective solutions.

There are three basic methods we use for copywriting:

Editing

This is the most common approach. It's also the less costly. You supply the text in your own words, we edit it applying a common style, emphasizing the appropriate points and making sure it fits.

Such an approach has the advantage of standardizing the tone of the copy – particularly useful when several members of staff have contributed text for use.

Technical

Quite often, certain industry sectors require a very specific approach to copy. This may be “accepted style” as in Education or relate to legal requirements as in Medical or Healthcare.....or the Legal Profession!

Where this applies, we will source a specialist copywriter to work on the project under our direction. This ensures that all technical requirements are met whilst maintaining the marketing “edge”.

Research and Journalistic

The most common problem for clients is finding the time to write the copy – even if it is copy just for editing. When this is the case, we can come to your office, conduct interviews with key staff, provide simple questionnaires to be completed and undertake research both on and off line.

The information we gain is then used to write the copy.

This is by far the best option as it provides truly incisive detail and written in an appropriate style from the off although the trade-off here is of course; price.