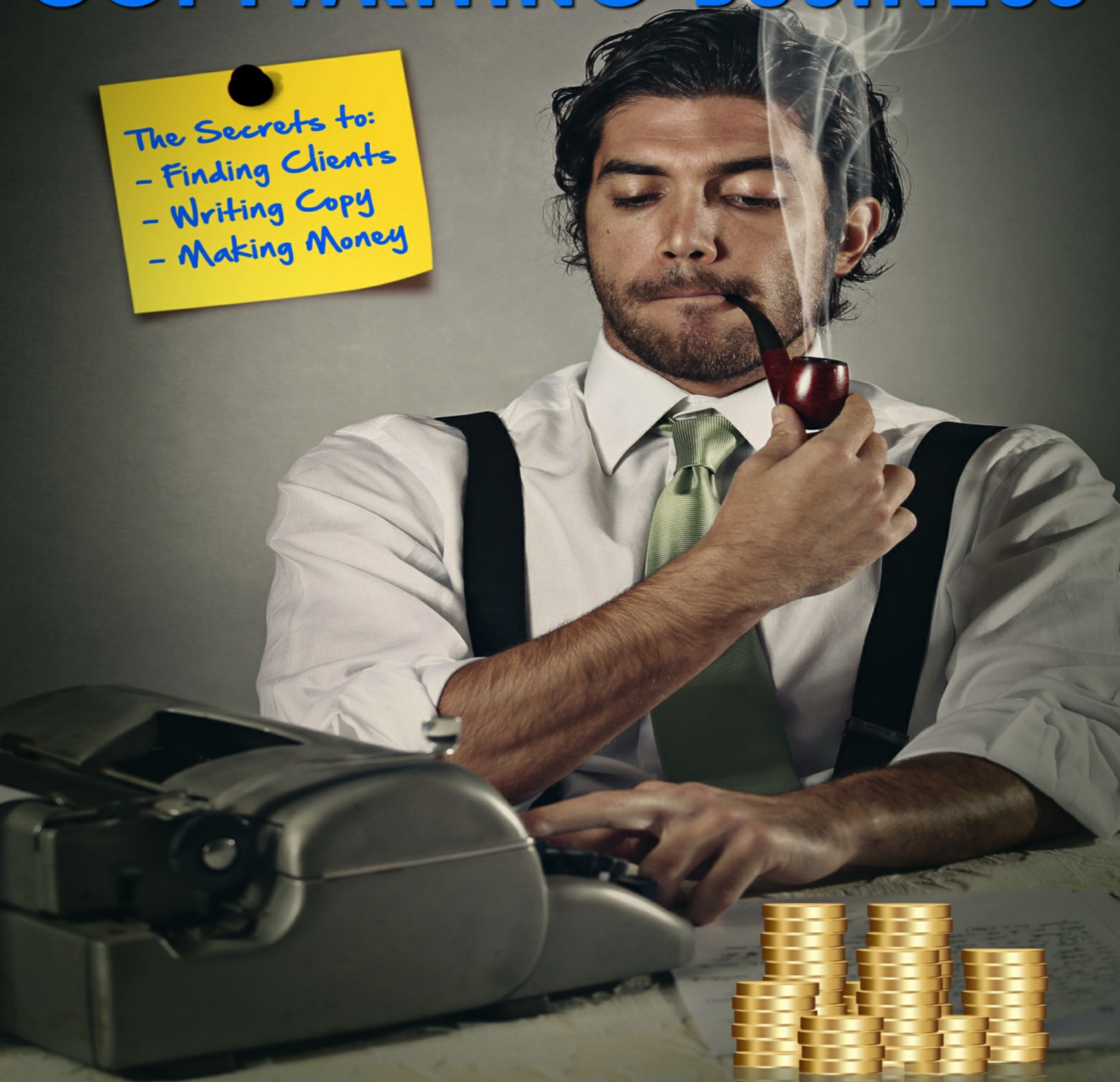


MATT  
AMBROSE

The Copywriter's Crucible's Guide to  
**STARTING A FREELANCE  
COPYWRITING BUSINESS**

- The Secrets to:
- Finding Clients
  - Writing Copy
  - Making Money



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## **Why I Wrote this Book**

I get a lot of emails from people eager to get started in the stimulating world of freelance copywriting. But many are worried about how to go about it. This is understandable. There's no shortage of books and courses on the art of copywriting, but few on how to launch a copywriting business.

Abandoning a fulltime income is also a scary prospect. It can be months (if not years) before you're banking regular profit. And that won't happen until you've built up a portfolio and worked out where to find clients willing to pay you for your deftness with a keyboard. Failure to solve any of these challenges will keep your business grounded, waiting for that lucky break that will allow takeoff.

I know all about the anxiety and the doubts when getting started, because I started my own copywriting business from scratch, with few clients and little experience.

When I quit my corporate job, I had one client and a rudimentary knowledge of the craft. It was a long time before I stopped feeling like an imposter and started to believe that I deserved to get paid for putting words in the right order. This book is designed to help fast track you through this process. I aim to address all the fears and challenges you face in those fragile first few months and to show you a clear path towards success.

I also cover the art of copywriting itself, but only as an introductory guide. My main focus is on sharing the advice I've given to aspiring copywriters over the years, many of whom I now happily count among my competitors. I sincerely hope that, after reading this book, you have the knowledge, confidence and determination to get your copywriting business up and running, and motoring towards job satisfaction and profit.

Matt Ambrose

[www.copywriterscrucible.com](http://www.copywriterscrucible.com)

## **Welcome to the World of Copywriting**

So you want to become a freelance copywriter? Welcome aboard. You're making a wise decision. Getting paid to write for a living is a rewarding and mentally stimulating career. You get to work from home, set your own hours and it puts you in the driving seat of your own destiny.

It's an alluring occupation, and one that attracts people in growing numbers. Whether it's ex-journalists fleeing the sinking newspaper world; agency copywriters eager to go it alone or people that just love to write, copywriting is a popular way to make a living.

But getting your copywriting business up and running can be a daunting task. There are all sorts of hurdles you'll have to clear, such as building a portfolio, finding clients and securing ongoing sources of work. Building a successful copywriting business is, indeed, a challenge. But it's not an impossible one.

To help pave the way to profit, this eBook aims to answer many of the key questions you'll face when getting started. Along with sourcing work and creating a website, I've included an overview on core copywriting tasks, advice on the psychology of selling, how to test the effectiveness of your writing and ways of making yourself more valuable to clients.

Based on my own experience of starting a copywriting business from scratch, I'll be

sharing with you the strategies and techniques that can transform you from an anxious beginner, almost afraid to answer the phone, into a confident sales machine. After reading this book, and practicing its principles, you'll savour every opportunity to tell business owners how your writing can grow their business. That's what I hope, anyway.

Before we get started into the world of salesmanship in print, a word of warning: whilst the internet has made it easier than ever to launch a copywriting business, it's also created a *lot* of competition. The online world is flooded with people that share the same dream as you. They also want to be topping up their bank balance through the simple act of tapping out words.

Indeed, the freelance copywriting world can be a tough nut to crack. If you don't have a marketing strategy in place, you can find yourself battling desperately with other writers for clients, like dogs fighting over a gristly slab of meat. So in this digital tome, along with guidance on writing articles, web pages, brochures, sales letters and more, you'll find tactics for growing your business and attracting clients. These will help you sidestep the competition and welcome a steady stream of clients.

Now that source of doubt has been addressed, let's step boldly forth and begin your journey into the exciting and inspiring world of freelance copywriting.

## **What Does a Copywriter Do?**

There comes a time in every copywriter's life when they have to tell people what they do. When you tell people you're a 'copywriter' half will think you wield a big virtual stamp of an encircled 'C' while the other half will nod politely without having a clue. Even if you tell them you're a freelance writer for businesses, misunderstanding continues to reign. Businesses employ writers? Whatever for?

A generation ago, copywriters worked almost exclusively within advertising agencies, PR firms and the marketing departments. Just like today, their job was to come up with radio and TV advertising campaigns, slogans, press releases, brochures and other marketing collateral. But unlike now, working as a copywriter from home was rare.

The internet has changed the profession dramatically. Yes, the majority of copywriters still work within agencies and marketing departments. But it's now possible for anyone to slap up a website and start offering copywriting services to clients. What's more, the internet has created more demand for copywriters than ever before. I'm not referring to the, now dated, task of hammering out endless keyword articles but writing serious marketing communications.

The days of static 'brochureware' websites are drawing to a close. Smart businesses know that their website has to be updated regularly for it to be an effective sales generating machine. Nothing screams stagnation and lack of ambition more than a company blog that

hasn't been updated in a year (to me it does, anyway). Websites are the first port of call for people when trying to decide whether a company is a worthy of their trade. As such, they need to be kept fresh and informative, packed with case studies, thought leadership articles and white papers.

Another reason why copywriters are needed on an ongoing basis is because the SEO game has changed. A few years ago you could overload your website with cheaply written, mass produced junk and Google would give you the nod of approval. But Google has got sophisticated. Its Penguin, Panda and Humming Bird updates have all run roughshod over websites with poor quality content or articles copied from elsewhere. A penalty and loss of rankings can then swiftly follow. As such, businesses now need well researched and professionally written content that attracts links naturally and keeps people reading if they want higher rankings.

As more businesses wake up to this fact, the demand for quality content from copywriters will be on the rise. This is why a lot of your early jobs will be assisting companies in keeping their websites updated, and earning a nice monthly retainer along with it.



## **Why Become a Copywriter?**

If you're convinced that the rollercoaster world of freelance copywriting is for you, feel free to skip on to the next chapter. Still have doubts? Allow me to persuade you...

First of all, you get to work from home. No more commuting to work, battling through the nine to five grind and enduring the soul draining theatre of office politics. Instead, you get to set your own hours and go for thoughtful morning strolls (or 'roadwork' as legendary copywriter Gary Halbert calls it) while others sit glumly in traffic.

When you find inspiration has gone astray, you simply unplug your laptop and saunter down to the local park or your coffee chain of choice to break through a creative brain freeze. Here's a tip, leave the power cable at home. Knowing you only have an hour or two of battery time will help you to grind through those window gazing moments.

The freelance copywriting lifestyle is, indeed, a good way to live if you're content in your company, which many of us tend to naturally be, and can be self-disciplined to get stuff done. And self-discipline is vital. When you go freelance it's all down to your business acumen, perseverance and a healthy dose of writing ability that will decide whether you succeed or not. You're in control of your own risks and rewards, and not answerable to anybody (apart from your clients and bank manager).

Another benefit of freelance copywriting is that it gives your brain a good workout. You're constantly learning about new topics, finding out about the latest innovations and having to think up ways of giving your clients' products a fresh angle. What you'll soon find is that diverse topics can interlace, giving you a fresh perspective others might not have thought of before. To give you an example, my knowledge of ergonomics from writing about industrial furniture came in handy when writing a white paper on the impact of the aging population on the workplace.

Then there's the act of copywriting itself. Copywriting is a profession where you never stop learning. From now until your final keystroke, you'll spend your life analysing the work of other copywriters, rereading the classics and looking for that elusive headline that will push up response. Your swipe file will grow from a folder into a box into an entire bookshelf. When reading magazines you'll find yourself more engrossed in the ads than the actual articles, and you'll notice how the same principles are as valid today as they were in the eras of David Ogilvy, John Caples and Claude Hopkins (if these names are unfamiliar, don't worry. A recommended reading is provided later on).

As your experience grows, your writing will improve. You'll relish every assignment as an opportunity to test yourself and to delight every client with copywriting that's more tight, engaging and persuasive than anything they've read before. As your list of testimonials and reputation grows so will your pool of clients, and your rate of pay along with it.

Freelance copywriting is, indeed, a career where hard work, talent and persistence are rewarded. It's no wonder so many people yearn to gain the lifestyle benefits and sense of accomplishment it can bring.

## **The Pros and Cons of Studying a Copywriting Course**

Good to see you've made it to chapter three. That means you're convinced that a career as a freelance copywriter is the one for you. But much like wanting to become a professional footballer or a rocket scientist, there is no fast track route to success. It takes a lot of hard work and perseverance to build your skills to a level where companies will happily pay you a tidy sum to be the voice of their brand.

Having bought this book, I'm assuming you're already decided to bypass working in an agency to build your experience. In this case, you have two options to develop your writing abilities: take a copywriting course or teach yourself.

### **Copywriting Courses**

Copywriting courses tend not to have the best of reputations. You don't need a degree in copywriting or an official diploma to become a copywriter. As such, anybody can create a copywriting course and pocket the money. This has, inevitably, led to a lot of courses that are overpriced and of questionable value, particularly when there's no one-to-one tuition involved.

Just so we're clear, I have no experience of studying copywriting courses. When I started out I took the bold/naïve decision to jump in at the deep end. I had no prior experience other than a History and English degree and some compliments on my writing style. I decided to take

on the challenge of teaching myself knowing it would be sink or swim. So I can't make any recommendations other than that you do your research, check reviews are authentic and maybe even contact people directly who've taken the course, before handing over the cash.

Having said that, if I were to recommend any course it would be Andy Maslen's '. Andy has been called Drayton Bird's spiritual successor and for good reason. His books on copywriting are pure dynamite and he's truly a thought leader within the UK copywriting scene. If I was to step back in time and begin my copywriting adventure again, I think I'd prefer the reassurance of a structured approach to building my knowledge and skills. Andy's course is the one I would take.

### **Teaching Yourself**

While I recommend taking a course, developing a grounding in copywriting is perfectly doable on your own. Studying the art of copywriting is lifelong pursuit, and it takes a lot of practice before you can command the fees of the top copy dogs. This humble eBook merely covers the basics. There are many more advanced books you should afterwards before venturing out with your business cards. What's more, I recommend reading them not just once but several times to get their guiding principles enshrined in your mind. While reading them, take plenty of notes and practice, practice, practice.

### **Required Reading**

These are the ‘canons of copywriting’ I recommend to get started, many of which I still reread to this day:

Claude Hopkins – Scientific Advertising

John Caples – Tested Advertising Methods

Bob Sugarman – The Adweek Copywriting Handbook

Victor O Schwab - How to Write an Advertisement

David Ogilvy – Ogilvy on Advertising

Eugene Schwartz – Breakthrough Advertising

Gary Halbert - The Boron Letters

Bob Bly – The Copywriting Handbook

Drayton Bird – How to Write a Sales Letter

Dan Kennedy - The Ultimate Sales Letter

Andy Maslen – Write to Sell

### **Haven’t Got a Portfolio? Create One**

Before they hire you, clients will want to see examples of your work. This can seem like a chicken and the egg dilemma. After all, how are you supposed to show clients what you can do if you haven’t written for any yet? Fear not, it is a dilemma easily solved.

While reading the copywriting canons, I recommend practicing the core principles along

the way. Practice writing attention grabbing headlines, persuasive sales letters and landing pages that take the reader's hand and escort them all the way to the checkout. It is only through practice that you'll learn. After all, you wouldn't pay a plumber to fix your pipes if they had to follow a training manual to do it.

Actually copying out examples of great copy word for word can also help. It enables you to step inside the mind of the copywriter who wrote them and understand the journey they wanted the reader to take. You should start working on your portfolio months before you approach any clients. I spent six months building my knowledge, skills and portfolio before I even considered offering my services as a freelance copywriter.

People are entrusting you to promote their businesses in a professional way. As such, they expect to hire someone who knows what they're doing. Clients don't want to be spending their marketing budget on someone that's scrambling to find out how to structure a press release the moment they've put down the phone. Reputations can take years to build, yet be destroyed in minutes.

## **How to Find Clients and Keep Them for Life**

In the world of fairy tales and dreams, to find clients all you need to do is launch a website, send out a few press releases and wait for the leads to roll in. But I have some tough love for you: finding clients is a constant battle. Building up a sufficient pool to keep your head above water, let alone make a profit, can take months, if not years.

I'm sorry to have to crush your dreams of overnight riches, but you have to step into this business with your eyes wide open. Clients won't start coming to you until you've built your reputation and experience to a level where they start recommending you to their peers and colleagues. Until that time arrives, you'll need to roll up your sleeves and go out to find clients on a near daily basis. Thankfully, there are plenty of places to look.

## **Freelance Bidding Sites – Terrible Pay But You Earn While You Learn**

One place where businesses connect with copywriters is on freelance bidding websites. These enable business owners to post projects for freelancers to submit proposals before picking a winner.

The problem with freelance bidding websites is that they are flooded with writers happy to write for dirt poor rates of pay. We're talking £0.06(\$0.08) per word or even lower. You're really going to struggle to survive on this unless you're happy to be chained to a metaphorical



conveyer belt, hammering out articles every hour with minimal research or a sense of pride.

What's worse is that some clients have got used to paying sweatshop rates for content (I wouldn't describe what they get as 'copy'). Persuading them that your time and ability is worth more than what you'd earn in a profession with a uniform and a name tag is a tough negotiation.

Over the long-term, you'll be able to shrug off these low ballers as not being serious business people. But when getting started, these sites are worth a visit with the right intentions.

Freelance bidding websites can be a great place to build your skills and experience. The pay is appalling. But at least you can practice writing articles, press releases and web pages and build your experience at managing clients and projects.

### **Network Locally - Yes, with Real People**

In my opinion, your best source of clients, who are happy to pay a fair rate for your work, are those in your local town or city. Once you've got a website you're proud to show off, brush down the power suit, get some business cards printed and start greasing some palms.

The first port of call is to find out about business networking events in your area. Is there a local Chamber of Commerce you can join? Are there any breakfast clubs for business owners?

LinkedIn and Meetup.com can also offer some local networking opportunities.

Attending networking events is a great way to build your reputation as the ‘go to’ local copywriting guy or gal. Along with meeting serious business owners who understand the value of professionally produced marketing, leaving your home and speaking to real people will help to avert a chronic case of cabin fever.

Us wordsmiths tend to be an introverted lot. Sitting at a keyboard and being lost in our own thoughts and ponderings is something we crave. Putting on a power suit and networking isn’t normally part of our DNA. But as with all things in life, you have to create your own opportunities. While talking about your business can feel awkward at first, as confidence in your own knowledge and abilities grows you’ll relish the chance to chat to people about the impact captivating copy can have on their bottom line and why they should hire you.

### **Approach Local SEO and Marketing Agencies**

PR firms and marketing agencies can be a goldmine for work. Whilst many have copywriters in-house, they often need to outsource work to cope with spikes in demand. The drawback is they get inundated with emails and letters from aspiring copywriters, and they’ll want to see clear evidence of the clients you’ve written for before sending work your way.

PR and marketing agencies are entrusting you to keep their clients happy and retained.

So you may want to keep approaching them on the backburner until you've got some experience and professional looking samples in your portfolio to wow them with.

### **Find People You Want to Write For**

Do you have any specialist knowledge? Do you have a degree in engineering or an active interest in green technology? A good path to attaining satisfaction in your copywriting career is to write about topics you have a passion for. So in the search for fulfilling projects, it makes sense to approach businesses in the field you already have an interest in.

To locate businesses within a specific industry, Google is your friend. You could also buy a list of postal addresses in a specific sector from a list broker. I always recommend sending a letter over email bombing prospects. Email may be the cheap, easy route which most people take, but that's precisely why it's largely ineffective for unsolicited mail campaigns.

In my opinion, a smarter, yet admittedly more expensive, approach is to put together a mailing pack. Include a tightly written sales letter along with samples of your work. The physicality of a printed letter will always trump an email that's a button press away from deletion. A follow-up phone call is also a good idea to reinforce to prospects that hiring you is the smart thing to do. Always remember: the best copywriters are also the best marketers.

### **Specialise. Don't Generalise**

Another benefit of targeting specific companies is that it can position you as an expert. Most copywriters start life as ‘generalists’, happy to write about every industry and topic with aplomb. Spreading your net out far and wide is a sensible approach at the beginning. The drawback is that it puts you in competition with all the other copywriters out there. On paper (literally) there’s nothing to differentiate you or to help you stand out. This is why a better strategy can be to position yourself as an expert on a specific field.

The highest paid copywriters are often those that specialise. Whether it’s specialising in landing pages, the weight loss niche or knowing more than most on helicopters, positioning yourself as having specific knowledge raises your value to clients. It can position you as the go to person in that industry, giving you the power to dictate your fees.

In the early days, it’s probably wise not to start closing doors when few are open to you. But it’s never too early to start thinking about what passions or interests you can develop as specialist subjects so you can command higher fees.

## **Creating a Website**

Your website is the engine room of your marketing strategy. Whilst you can't rely on it to drive leads on its own, your website is the yardstick by which people will gauge the quality of your service. As such, its design, imagery and content should reflect the standard of your writing and what clients can expect to get.

If you don't have £1000s to spend on a site built from scratch, it's possible to create a professional looking site for less than a steak dinner. All of my websites are built using customised templates hosted on Wordpress. Wordpress is free software that started life as a blogging platform but has since evolved to become a powerful content management system. In fact, many businesses now run their websites on Wordpress rather than costly proprietary frameworks.

Another reason to use Wordpress is its extensive selection of professional looking themes. There are plenty of free ones, but for a professional appearance I recommend breaking open the piggybank and buying a business focused theme you can update with your branding. I buy all my themes from Themeforest.net, and I recommend you do the same. Most are supplied with instructions on how to customise them to include your images, text and preferred layout. But a lot of the time you can simply drag and drop the elements you want in the right places. Should you run into problems, the theme's developers are normally only too happy to answer your questions at no extra cost.

Setting up Wordpress websites becomes straightforward enough after some practice. But if uploading files by FTP, setting up databases and messing around with HTML sounds like a party you'd rather not attend then you can hire someone to set it up for you so you can 'focus on running your business' (Copywriting Cliché # 8).

## **Working Out How Much to Charge**

Admit it: one of the big attractions of freelance copywriting was the money, right? It's true: copywriting can earn you a comfortable income. Charging £300(\$450) per day is realistic once you've got some experience and your testimonials page is filling up. In fact, you can push your earnings as high as £500(\$750) per day with a couple of decades' experience. Earning four figures for sales letters and white papers is also possible once you've accumulated some figures on click throughs, responses and sales. By that stage you can look forward to clients begging you to fit them into your busy schedule, and the days of badgering people for work a distant memory.

But when you're starting out, it's wise to gauge what to charge based on practicalities. Once you've bought your laptop and setup a website, the costs of running a copywriting business are low. In our line of work, a moleskin notebook and a cake to go with your coffee can feel like splashing out. But there are all sorts of living costs to think about. For an idea on how much you need to charge, calculate all your monthly expenses, such as mobile phone bill, rent or mortgage, clothes, food, energy bills, and maybe even the odd night out. You also have to think about tax, national insurance, oh and don't forget you'll now have to contribute to your own pension. You also won't be getting paid for any holidays or days off when you're sick. Worst of all, you'll be paying for your own Christmas party. But with just one attendee, it needn't be too lavish.

You also have to remember that you won't be working for clients the entire week. You have to look after your own bookkeeping, respond to enquiries and submit proposals. Marketing is also an ongoing activity that will eat up your time and money.

There are always ups and downs when freelancing. There will be times when you don't see the light of day and others when you wonder whether you'll ever work again. So when you're going through a feast stage it's always wise to be putting enough money aside to keep you going should you find yourself going through a famine.

With all this considered, when starting out it's sensible to think about what you'd need to charge, based on all your expenses, to keep yourself profitable. It's also wise to have at least six months worth of savings in the bank to keep the business engine running while you build momentum. Giving yourself enough runway for lift off is another apt metaphor.

### **Charge Per word? Per Day? Per Project?**

Charging per word can seem sensible. It's quantifiable and gives clients a yardstick by which to gauge what they're getting for their money. But not all words are equal. Writing a blog post on the benefits of yoga is a different kettle of fish to distilling a white paper on the business case for remote working. There may be extensive research involved, interviews and technical information to get your head around. Then there's the process of writing the thing itself.



Writing a 500 word blog post can sometimes take less time than composing a 100 word email. With fewer words to play around with, every sentence has to be carefully thought out to maximise readership and response rates. Fewer words just means you to expend more thinking into every one you choose. It's no mystery why some copywriters get paid thousands for sales letters while others get pocket change for an SEO keyword article.

So as you can see, charging per word is not the best strategy. You're not a hardware store selling nails. The amount of time, energy and window gazing it can take to write different types of copy can vary considerably. So it makes more sense to charge per project based on how long you think it will take.

When charging per project, it's wise to set some baseline figures to work from. Calculate what you think you'd need to charge for articles, web pages and direct marketing copy, where success is linked directly to response. You can then adjust your rate accordingly based on how much time an assignment will take and how much revenue your writing is likely to generate for the client.

## Replying to Emails So You Get the Gig

As your reputation and network of contacts spreads, referrals and enquiries will roll in. Who knows, you might even receive a few through Google if you're lucky. It happened to me for a while.

Once upon a time I ranked page one for the golden 'copywriter' keyword, just below Wikipedia. That was until Google decided to add some numbers to its algorithm and flip the rules of SEO upside down. It decided that my enthusiastic linking strategy was an SEO misdemeanour, and I've been banned from appearing on page one ever since.

To cut a long story short, what I can tell you is that I've received my fair share of email enquiries over the years and have developed a strategy on the best way to respond. When people search for copywriters via a Google search they'll typically email a bunch to try and get the best price. This means that the messages you'll receive will often be a very brief description of their project and immediately wanting to know what you'd charge. In my opinion, the worst thing you can do is reply with a price.

As you'll learn from reading the canons of copywriting, people purchase for emotional and practical reasons. Simply giving the client a ballpark figure doesn't give them a reason to hire you. If anything, it will frighten them off because you haven't given them enough reasons *why* you're charging more than the pack of copywriters fighting for scraps on freelance bidding

sites. Instead, you need to build trust in your expertise. You have to reassure them that they're gaining a lot more from you than mere words alone. They are gaining the services of someone who understands marketing, who knows how to use psychology to get a response and can support them throughout this project and beyond

So, stating a price too early merely puts a hurdle in the way before you've had a chance to convince them why they should hire you. Instead, tell them about your existing experience of writing for their industry or how their website could be improved. Demonstrate your knowledge by pointing out some key copywriting principles that are going to help drive up responses to their campaign. You could, for example, advise them on the importance of setting the right tone for the personality type of their target customer, of structuring the pages so they take visitors on a predetermined path and the common mistakes less knowledgeable copywriters make.

### **Reinforce Why You're an 'Added Value' Copywriter**

Along with discussing the project at hand, you could also tell them about the 'added value' services (more on this later) you can offer beyond mere words alone. This could include help with setting up Google Analytics, advice on creating an autoresponder series that builds rapport over time, split testing pages or developing an inbound marketing strategy. These are all services you can add to your expertise over time, and increase your value to clients and rate of pay.

Once you've built trust and confidence in your expertise, and received an email back, you can then get down to the business of talking money. I recommend against going in too low. This just devalues your service and lowers their expectations. Being hired because you're cheap is not a good foundation for a healthy and long lasting relationship. You want to begin on a basis of mutual respect and getting paid a fair rate for your words.

Instead, be confident about what you have to offer. Charge the rate you've calculated to keep you in profit and match your level of experience. Having said that, it's sometimes wise to leave the door open to negotiation if it's a project you really want to work on and the client has an understandably limited budget, such as if they're a start-up or they're a solopreneur just getting their product off the ground. But if they immediately try to slice your rates in half then politely bring discussions to a close. You'll feel better for it and working for low balling clients is a relationship only heading for disappointment and disaster, often in the form of unpaid invoices.

When you do agree a price it's always wise to ask for 50 percent upfront and then the balance upon completion. This gives you some protection in case the client does a Houdini act after graciously accepting your completed draft. Even better, send them a purchase order agreement before you write anything. This outlines all your terms of business and gives you cast iron protection if a project goes off the rails and you find yourself having to chase payment through the courts.

## **Getting Paid**

While on the topic of agreements and money, there will be times when clients are either slow or seem to resent paying you at all. My system of payment resolution is, after a previous request for payment is ignored, to open an email with the line 'I'm beginning to get concerned'. This immediately lets them know that the relationship is stepping out of friendly territory and that you're arms are folded in preparation for more assertive measures.

If your emails are still meeting a wall of silence, the next stage is to email them a detailed explanation of the small claims court process (please visit the small claims court website to familiarise yourself before sending this email). Advise them that now your attempts at resolving the issue of non-payment have failed the next step is to get it resolved arbitrarily. The good news is that they won't need to attend court and that the dispute can be resolved simply by submitting all the relevant emails. The bad news is that additional costs and interest will be added to the price of the invoice.

If this still fails to get a response, at least they can't say they weren't warned when they do actually receive an official notice from the courts demanding payment. Another option is to pay a solicitors firm to send them a letter. I believe there are some that offer this at little cost, because essentially, at such an early stage, they're doing is allowing you to use their official letterhead. I've never tried this myself but they'd have to be an especially stubborn or broke client to not be alarmed by solicitors joining the fray.

## **How to Ensure You Get Repeat Business from Your Client Pool**

It costs five times more to sell to a new customer than to an existing one. Where this figure originally came from, nobody knows. But it's one of those stats that gets everyone nodding in sage agreement every time it's mentioned. Nobody questions whether or not it's accurate for a simple reason: it makes total sense.

Clients come and go like changes in the wind. They may submerge out of sight for years and then suddenly resurface, out of the blue, requesting a new website, brochure and video for their new software launch. With this in mind, it's wise to tend to your clients like a loving gardener to a flower bed. You should always be nurturing their reliance on your copywriting and marketing expertise. This will ensure you always have enough around to keep your keyboard busy.

## **Treat New Clients like a New Best Friend**

People like to do business with those they know and trust. This is another cliché that gets everyone nodding. It's also equally valid, because clients want to work with people they have a good feeling for, whom they respect and enjoy a relationship based on mutual benefit.

Marketing agencies have account managers to schmooze clients. When you're self-employed, you have to look after the bond building yourself. Always be polite and professional.

While you may not have met in person, it's wise to begin phone calls with general chit chat about the weather, holidays or sports. Who knows, you might even have some other interests in common beyond the project at hand.

But ultimately, to keep clients happy and retained you need to provide a high quality service. Reply promptly to emails, never accuse clients of contradicting what was stated in the brief and *never ever* deliver copy late. B2B clients, in particular, value efficiency and reliability with deadlines sacrosanct.

Also, never send a first draft with your invoice attached. This makes the client feel uncomfortable asking for amends. Secondly, it gives the impression that the project is completed as far as you're concerned, which is a decision only the client can make. Instead, make it clear you're happy to make any amends they want. Let them know that the tone, content and proposition can all amended if they wish, and the doors to constructive feedback are always open.

### **Stay in Touch**

Once you've actioned any amends, and the final draft is signed off, it's good practice to keep the channels of communication open on an ongoing basis. Create a spreadsheet of every client so you can send them all an email every few months updating them about your new marketing services, to offer valuable insights on new marketing strategies or just to touch base.

If you're feeling brave and opportunistic, you could also ask them to forward on your email to anyone they know in need of a copywriter. Never forget, you create your own opportunities in this world.

So look after your clients. Treat them as you would a relative or friend you want to stay in touch with and want to help out whenever you can. That way you'll be able to continue reeling in business from your client pool for many years to come.



## **Don't Fear the Phone**

You can try to avoid it, but eventually you'll have to pick up the phone (or in this day and age Skype) and actually talk to clients. I know talking on the phone isn't what you signed up for. But talking to clients can be a much more effective way of securing projects than email alone. It shows you're a real person who wants to help them grow their business. It also enables you to discuss their project beyond what you may cover in a tightly worded email.

Whether it's speaking to a new client to discuss their project or interviewing someone for a case study, it's a good idea to prepare for the call in advance. Assess what information you need to get from them and what questions you'll want to cover in the call. Then email them your questions beforehand so they have time to think. Otherwise time can be wasted while they scratch their heads for answers or hunting for files or bits of paper.

Preparing a list of questions also gives your call a structure and ensures all the key points are covered. I use Skype for all my calls because it gives me a number which resembles a UK landline clients can call me. It also enables me to record calls and play them back. You'll be amazed at what you can miss if you spend the entire call scribbling notes rather than asking probing questions. You also get lots of juicy quotes which project their passion for their business more authentically than you could ever replicate yourself.

So don't fear the phone. See it as an opportunity to create closer bonds and to unearth a

more impassioned, authentic sales message than you'd get by email alone.

## Creating a Swipe File

Improving your copywriting skills is a lifelong pursuit. It comes from practice, reading as deeply and widely as you can and from studying the writing style and approaches of the legendary copywriters that came before you. Thankfully, it's possible to do this without having to attend expensive seminars or paying \$1000s for a few hours of the copywriter's time. All you need is a laptop, with internet access, a printer and a pen.

The word 'copywriting' comes from way previous generations used to copy and adapt existing ads for their own products. Similarly, you can become a better copywriter through the simple act of copying out successful ads, sales letters and high converting web pages by hand.

The simple act of copying the writing of a master wordsmith should be part of every aspiring copywriter's daily routine. It helps to ingrain into your mind *what it feels like* to compose high converting landing pages and emails. It's almost as though you can *plug into* the writer's mind and see through their eyes how they constructed a compelling argument through the simple act of combing words together.

Studying different styles of copywriting can also help develop your own. Just as song writers are influenced by other musicians, you can evolve your writing style by sponging up the techniques and wordplay of the greats.

You can find plenty of great samples by Googling the name of copywriting greats, such as Gary Halbert, Clayton Makepeace, Bob Sugarman or David Ogilvy. One great resource is [www.swiped.co](http://www.swiped.co). You can search for free through the website's vast collection of sales letters and ads which you can study to assess how they are structured and why they are successful. A good way of doing this is to get four sheets of paper and mark them 'attention', 'desire', 'interest' and 'action'. Then note down how the copywriter fulfills each criteria of a strong sales proposition through their use of words and psychology, enabling them to generate high responses for their clients.

Along with studying samples of the greats, it's a good idea to print off any web pages, sales letters or adverts that grab your attention, keep you engaged and make you want to buy the product. Then whenever you're stuck for inspiration you can dip into your files and pull out a winning promotion for ideas you can adapt and tweak to create a high converting sales page of your own.

## **Writing Websites with a Purpose**

The problem with a lot of business websites is that they have no purpose. Whilst they might have the sort of modern design that only comes from spending a king's ransom and content that packs in all the corporate sound bites, too often little thought is given to what they need to achieve.

Just like every piece of marketing, a website should have an ROI. It should be built with a structure and a strategy that will maximise its chance of generating leads for the business. Otherwise it's just an exercise in corporate backslapping, with the ambiguous merits of 'branding'.

It's no great boast to say that copy is the driving force of a website's ability to sell. It falls on the copywriter's shoulders to ensure every page nudges visitors towards taking action. Whether it's requesting a demo, downloading a free trial or asking for a quote, websites should be designed with a goal in mind and it's copy that propels visitors towards it.

Websites should always be designed with a logical path of thought, which takes visitors from curious to enlightened and ready to buy. It should take them firmly by the hand and escort them like a tour guide from one page to the next on a journey that builds their confidence and trust in a business' credibility.

## **Scrap Robot Speak**

If websites are online shops, its developers and graphic designers that look after the outfitting and decoration while copywriters look after the shifting merchandise. It's copy that will build rapport and persuades visitors to take action, not how beautiful the website looks. As such, a robotic or impersonal tone won't work. You're writing for living, breathing people, not fax machines. You wouldn't address people in real life with jargon and hyperbole, so cut it out and instead communicate in a language visitors understand.

You'll often hear how writing for the web is different to writing brochures and sales letters offline. This is because the internet can seem an impersonal medium. So you have to do whatever you can to make websites sound human and approachable, and write in a more conversational and friendly tone than you would in the corporate brochure.

People also scan words online, rather than read every word. So it's wise to keep sentence lengths short and punchy. A sensible target is an average sentence length of 15 words, with plenty of variation to give text a bouncy sense of rhythm. A large block of text can also look intimidating to read, so it's wise to keep pages to around 300 words and to split long pages in two.

In summary, websites should have a friendly tone, be tightly written and take visitors on a journey that addresses objections and reinforces why the client's solution is better than any

other available. Focus on this, rather than sounding impressive, and you'll have a website that converts browsers into buyers and generates quantifiable results for your clients.

## **Writing Brochures for Buyers Rather than the Boardroom**

The corporate brochure - has more money ever been spent on something that gives so little in return? Too often, corporate brochures are an exercise in self congratulation rather than marketing. They're created just to say 'see how good I look', rather than to present an structured sales pitch.

Too often corporate brochures force readers to wade through pages of irrelevant preening, with photos of the warehouse and the pretty receptionist instead of the information that really matters. The result is that eyelids droop, interest is lost and brochures find themselves heading for landfill.

Brochures can be like the loud mouth at the cocktail party, boorishly regaling tales of their accomplishments without listening to the people around them. A cardinal rule of copywriting is that readers want to know 'what's in it for me". They're not interested in listening to endless boasting. They want to know how the business can solve their problem and this should be the corporate brochure's focus: building trust with customers and proving their credibility.

So when sitting down with clients, it's a good idea to ask them what they want their brochure to achieve? To announce a new product? To attract new business? Or simply to use up the year's marketing budget? When you've identified the end goal, it's then easier to plan what



the brochure needs to say and what the reader needs to know, rather than what the boardroom wants to tell them.

Understanding the need to focus on the customer will also help the client to appreciate the benefits of adopting a tone that's more human, and not like a stiff, corporate drone. While more formal than a website, you shouldn't be afraid to use a tone that's down to earth, direct and friendly.

A corporate brochure can be structured in a similar way to a website:

**Introduction** – Typically this is an address by the CEO or a top level manager. Rather than boast about that quarter's profits, focus on something the reader would be interested to know, such as a new product development or something that's happened in the market. Explain what the brochure is about and give them a reason to read further.

**Who we are** – In this section you want to build trust by revealing the experience and values of the people running the business. You can also tell the reader about how quickly the business is growing, its assets and other factors that reinforce why it is a safe and secure organisation to trade with.

**What we do** – Now you've built some credibility, it's time to tell readers what you actually make or do. This is where you give an overview of your products and services, and what makes them special. Ram home your USPs on what special buttons your widgets have and why your service is better than the rest.

**Build Proof** – As always, you need to backup your claims. Provide case studies, testimonials and real life examples of how your product solves your customers' problems.

**Call to action** - This is where most brochures go wrong: they don't tell the reader what to do. Whether it's to request a free quote, visit the website or to take advantage of a time limited discount, give readers something to do. This will improve response rates and help to generate an ROI for all the matt laminated artwork and your captivating copy. You can then construct a brochure with a real ROI, and not just an expensive corporate luxury.

### **What Comes first? Copy or Design?**

Should you ever get stuck in a log cabin with a designer after an avalanche it's wise to avoid the topic of copy versus design. But no matter how hard you try, eventually the conversation will find its way to addressing this most undeniable of room imprisoned elephants. Once the subject of whether copywriting or design comes first arises, a gully will suddenly emerge between you that can never be crossed. This is a shame, because the answer is obvious. Yes, designers have the responsibility to make brochures look pretty and inviting to read. But when it comes to the actual job of building rapport, gaining trust and selling, copy wins every time.

After all, you only know how much space there is left for images once the brochure's overriding message has been established and the length of copy agreed. No doubt, plenty of designers will disagree, but then this is a book about common sense copywriting and what

approach will generate real results for businesses instead of what looks nice.

## **Writing Emails that Get Opened, Read and Responded to**

Despite all the fuss over social media, email continues to be the workhorse of internet marketing. Time and again it's proven to generate higher responses and more sales than nearly any other online tactic, and puts social media to shame. What's more, email readership has rocketed in recent years with people now checking their emails throughout the day on their smartphones in spare moments throughout the day.

Email campaigns are relatively cheap to run and you can measure their success to the last click. But for campaigns to be a success, they have to be opened, read and responded to.

## **Getting Emails Past the Spam Filters**

With spam the digital equivalent of raw sewage, junk filters are getting ever more zealous in blocking suspicious messages. This means you should avoid using a spammer's language if you want to get past the gatekeeper. Don't use words and phrases like FREE, amazing, buy now, congratulations, dear friend, great offer, investment, special promotion or winner.

To check whether you're subject line is spam free, give your email a quick health check using Contactology's' free content checker ([http://www.contactology.com/content-checker](#)). Simply paste in your email to get a report on its spam rating and what you can do to remedy its ills.

Along with a clean subject line, make sure your email campaign is permission based with a double opt in mechanism. In plain English, this means that when people register for your emails they also have to click on a link in the first email to confirm their subscription. This tells your subscribers' inbox that your email address has been given the green light for entry. Asking recipients to add you to their address book is always a smart idea.

### **Getting Emails Opened - Irresistible Subject Line**

There is nothing more important, or difficult to get right, in email marketing than the subject line. If the subject line doesn't grab the reader they'll never make it to the first line, putting your entire campaign in jeopardy.

Normally when it comes to writing headlines, the best practice is to promise a benefit. But when it comes to email, people have become jaded by the number of promotional emails besieging their inboxes. Trying to be clever just marks you as yet another self-serving message trying to penetrate their spam filters and gain at least a glance of attention. This is why classic advertising style subject lines are doomed to failure. Instead, countless tests and reports have shown that the best approach is to simply state what's in the email.

It's always wise to get in your keywords and experiment, such as personalizing with their name. But ultimately the best strategy is to simply tell them what they'll discover in your

message to maximise readership and response.

### **Emails Act as the Intro**

You'll notice a lot of the same copywriting principles echoed throughout this book. That's because, whether you're writing an email or a sales letter, the same psychological tricks apply, with some fine tuning. In the case of email, composing messages is a lot like writing a sales letter, just without the luxury of space or time. Concise and tight is the name of the game. With a maximum of 200 words to play around with, if your offer needs more explanation then the email should merely act as the intro for building intrigue with a link to a longer sales pitch on the website.

Email is a more personal medium than a website, making it a powerful tool for building rapport with customers. It feels more like a one-to-one conversation than a speech to an audience. As such, email copy works best when it's snappy, friendly and chatty. It also helps to write in a style that appeals to the personality type of your target reader (more on this in a later chapter). Create an image of them in your head. Imagine what they look like, what they're interested in and what frustrates them in their jobs or daily life. Then picture them sat across the table and compose your message as though you're addressing them face-to-face.

### **Say Something Interesting**

Do you immediately try to sell something to people when you meet them in real life? If you do, maybe you might want to consider becoming a salesman of the verbal variety. Otherwise, your email should open the same way as the start of a face-to-face conversation. Comment on the news, tell them a startling fact or simply state the problem you're addressing. Consider harnessing the power of storytelling by describing the chain of events that led to the discovery you want to share with them.

Once you've got your reader's interest piqued, it's a smooth transition into revealing your client's product with instructions on what to do next. Whether you're writing emails, press releases or web pages, copy should always have a call to action. When it comes to emails, your call to action could be to ask them to visit your website for a longer sales pitch, to email you for more info or to place an order.

After your message has been sent, remember to track your stats for open rates and unsubscribes. That way you know which subject lines and topics are red hot and which leave readers cold. The beauty of email is that you can gauge a campaign's success to the very last click, and challenge yourself to write ever more enticing subject lines and messages that get emails opened, read and responded to in ever higher numbers.

## **Writing Press Releases that Appeal to Journalists and Buyers Alike**

Press releases can be a golden ticket to free advertising. But when done badly, they can generate as much exposure as the grand opening of a sliding door. The key is to write press releases that actually have something newsworthy to say. They also have to make the journalist's job as easy as possible by packing in all the key information in a format that's easy to reprint.

A common mistake is to treat press releases like sales copy. Overloading them with superlatives and chest beating makes them impossible for journalists to use. Instead, press releases should be written from third person and provide an objective announcement of news.

When writing press releases there's no need to reinvent the wheel. Stick to the time proven format so that busy journalists don't have to pick apart your writing to understand what the press release is about. Press releases should be written like an inverted pyramid, with the key information first and then descending in importance. This ensures the journalist can understand your news' significance quickly and decide whether it's worthy of being in their publication.

**Headline** – Rather than promise a benefit or build intrigue, simply state what the press release is about.

**Paragraph 1** – Your first line should immediately explain what the story is, free of hype or waffle. It should establish the who, what, when, where and how of what the press release is about.



**Paragraph 2** – Expand with more information on why the news is important. Provide evidence to backup what you’ve stated in the first paragraph.

**Paragraph 3** – Now it’s time to drop in a quote. More than likely, you’ll be asked to write this by the client on their behalf. Use it as an opportunity to liven things up with a juicy announcement that would sound too hypey elsewhere in the release. Provide a pullout the journalist can use to give their story impact.

**Paragraph 4** – Now is your chance to tell people about your client. Stick to the same objective tone used throughout and state the facts when describing their size and accomplishments.

**Contact details** – Provide email address and phone number for enquiries.

To distribute your press release you can either use a professional distribution service, such as PRWeb (US and global) or Darryl Wilcox (UK centric). If you want to maximise your chances of your PR getting picked up at specific magazine or website, it’s a good idea to draw up a hit list of journalists and to email them directly. Advise them in the email why they should be interested in your story and why it would fit perfectly in their publication.

Press releases are also great for SEO. In fact, some internet marketers build their rankings and traffic from press releases alone. So why not mention this to clients to encourage a steady stream of work from writing press releases that build exposure, generate sales enquiries and give their Google ranking a boost at the same time.

## **How to Write Articles and Blogs**

When first starting out, writing blogs and articles will be your bread and butter. To get paid a decent rate the key is to package them as ‘content marketing’. That way you’re offering clients a strategy, and not just words to be dumped on their website and forgotten about. Content marketing revolves around offering articles of real informative value. Articles which answer customer questions, aid their buying decisions and build trust in the client’s expertise. When you can attach an ROI to it this way, delivering well researched content which can help build trust in your client’s expertise should be done on the cheap.

Along with content marketing, there are other ways of differentiating your article writing service by linking it to a wider online marketing strategy.

## **Inbound marketing**

Well researched, informative articles can also be used as part of an ‘inbound marketing’ strategy. This entails publishing links to the articles in social media and forums like a big net for reeling in visitors back to the website. You can then offer them a free eBook or download in order to get them subscribed to the client’s news feed (RSS) or email list. There’s a saying in marketing circles that ‘the money is in the list’. In other words, once you have people subscribed to your content you can continue to sell to them over and over again and turn a single sale into repeat business.

## **Guest Posting**

Guest posting is another service you can offer as part of an article writing package. In basic terms, SEO revolves around two things: regularly updating a website with fresh content and attracting links from other relevant websites. Guest posting is a popular and effective way of building up backlinks. The site you're publishing to gets new content and you get a backlink for your client.

What's more, guest posting can be a great way of building your client's brand and building traffic from the websites where your articles are published. But for guest posting to be successful you have to be able to offer content that's well written, informative and offers fresh insight that's not already been said a million times before.

## **eBooks**

I've always been a fan of repurposing content in multiple ways. This includes repackaging a blog post series as an eBook. Your client can then offer this for free to build their subscriber base or simply email it to customers as a free gift. Another tactic is to republish a series of posts in a weekly email autoresponder series that offers valuable information on how to solve a common problem in a series of steps.

Thankfully, a lot of businesses are wising up to the need for quality content on their

website and it can be used to drive a wider online marketing strategy. So the time is ripe to offer clients advice on developing a content marketing campaign, along with the articles and blog posts to drive it. Not only will this differentiate you from cheap SEO article writing services but it will also justify your higher rate of pay.

## **Articles**

Articles are structured in a similar way to an essay. You introduce the topic, discuss the viewpoints, back up your assertions with evidence and then tie everything together with a neat conclusion at the end. The difference is that you're not writing to satisfy an examining board but instead to engage with customers. So write in a conversational and friendly style, with short sentences and brief paragraphs focused on one idea.

A short first line is a punchy way to start an article. State a fact, ask a question or pose a dilemma. Say something that gets the reader's attention rather than spending too much time setting the scene. The first paragraph can then expand on the first line by telling the reader what the article is about and hinting at the conclusion.

Once you've set the topic, subsequent paragraphs should discuss different views or facets to the topic. Provide evidence to support your statements and share conflicting opinions that might challenge the reader's preconceptions and make them sit up and take notice.

Before you write anything, it's a good idea to read some of the client's existing content to gauge style and tone. That way there won't be any surprises or the need for urgent rewrites on deadline day. Even if you deliver on time, if the client is unhappy with what you've produced they may not stay a client for long. Whatever you're writing, it pays (literally) to spend extra time ensuring copy hits the bullseye the first time when writing for a new client.

As always, research is about two thirds of the job. Allocate plenty of time to digging up the facts, views and the latest insights on a topic. This will help you to structure your article into a coherent and structured argument.

I recommend getting opinions from at least three sources to create a meaty article, packed with evidence to backup your assertions. It also helps to come at a topic from a new angle, and not merely to regurgitate the same top ten covered a million times before. Have an opinion. Challenge the status quo. Rattle a few cages to create some controversy and to attract subscribers that convert into leads for your client.

## **SEO Copywriting - Why Quality Matters More than Quantity**

SEO copywriting can be the fast food of copywriting gigs. You get paid close to slave wages to churn out an endless flow of articles designed purely to feed Google's spiders. The rates of pay are derisory, and hammering out articles every fifteen minutes is going to drain your enthusiasm, and sense of pride, fast.

The problem is that many clients have got used to paying peanuts for SEO copy. Quality isn't of the highest concern, all they want is quantity. This mindset hasn't been helped by the flood of newbie writers willing to accept terrible pay for the sake of getting work, triggering a race to the bottom of the pay scale on many freelance websites.

But the tide is changing. Google is getting smarter, and SEO copywriting is becoming more sophisticated with it. Following its Penguin, Panda and Humming Bird updates, Google can spot poorly written or rehashed content and won't touch it with a bargepole. Even worse, it can blacklist a site altogether if it thinks the site owner is guilty of trying to subvert its search results.

The need for quality content is only going to rise as search engines get better at gauging which websites keep visitors engaged and which send them fleeing like the plague. This includes factors like time on site, the number of page views per visit and the website's bounce rate (the percentage that leave without visiting more than one page). It's rumoured that these are already

numbers in Google's mysterious algorithm, but if not they soon will be.

Social media is also starting to have a big impact, both in terms of link building but also for sending traffic. In fact, social media generates close to half of all traffic for a large proportion of sites and this will only increase as the internet becomes more social. It's clear - the need for quality content is rising. Keyword stuffing alone won't do the job anymore. Instead, businesses need SEO content people actually read and respond to if they want a boost in rankings.

But having said that, SEO optimisation tactics aren't completely dead...yet. It's still wise to put keywords in the article's title and subheads, and to sprinkle them throughout. A keyword concentration of 3-5 percent is a good target.

Then the focus needs to be on the reader. Write articles that answer their questions, highlight the product's benefits and offer real informative value. The benefit of this is that, along with higher rankings, providing useful information builds trust in the business' expertise and can resolve objections that might otherwise block a sale. So you get a double whammy of benefits in every article.

### **Educate Clients on SEO and Boost Your Rate of Pay**

Many SEO agencies have abandoned the old practices of bulk buying content to

becoming content producers themselves. There's no reason why copywriters can do the same and promote their own content marketing packages. Along with making yourself more valuable to clients, content marketing combined with SEO can provide an ongoing source of income.

The need for quality SEO content is rising. Along with boosting traffic, quality content that answers customer questions and removes barrier can improve a website's conversion rate. So make sure you inform clients of this at every opportunity to create a new source of ongoing revenue and to increase your rates of pay.



## **Create Captivating Case Studies with the Power of Storytelling**

Case studies can be one of the most persuasive forms of marketing in a copywriter's locker. They're powerful because they harness storytelling to build the customer's confidence and swoop under their anti-sales message radar. Instead of empty boasts and hype, case studies explain how a business solved a customer's problem in real life, thus demonstrating their expertise based on facts rather than promises.

However, many case studies fail to take advantage of their inherent power because they're written in the same self-congratulatory, back slapping manner of the corporate brochure. The result is that the reader's cynicism immediately goes on full beam, and the act of slipping a covert sales message into their minds is lost.

Case studies should always be driven by the facts. They should focus on delivering a clear, concise explanation on a problem, how it was solved and the benefits gained. Here's how I recommend structuring case studies:

**Challenge** – Open the case study with an overview of the client (their industry, size etc) and the problem faced. Then explain why a problem is hurting them and the other solutions tried, without stepping into the legal minefield of mentioning competitors by name.

**Solution** - In chronological order, discuss all the hurdles that had to be cleared, such as

what process changes were implemented or new solutions devised. Don't worry about explaining every step in great depth. Instead, focus on the actual problems and how they were solved. Dropping in a few juicy quotes will also help to give your solution a human voice and ground the events in reality.

**Benefits** - Your conclusion should focus on the hard facts of the benefits gained e.g. increased sales, cost savings or extra customers. You can then expand the conclusion to discuss some of the softer benefits, such as an enhanced reputation and the development of systems that can be used in future projects.

Finally, close your case study with a 'superhero quote' from a customer on your client's performance throughout the project. This will give your case study the persuasive power of third party endorsement and a layer of authenticity few other types of marketing can achieve.

## Writing Sales Letters that Get a Response

*“If you spend your advertising budget entertaining the consumer, you’re a bloody fool. Homemakers don’t buy a new detergent because the manufacturer told a joke on televisions last night. They buy the new detergent because it promises a benefit.” – David Ogilvy*

Writing sales letters is the most demanding task you’ll face as a copywriter. They are the yardstick by which your talent is gauged and the badge that shows you are, indeed, a master of salesmanship in print.

Writing sales letters that reel in readers and keep them engaged until the last full stop is tough. What’s more, the success of your writing is directly linked to sales. This puts your prowess as a wordsmith on display for clients to gauge based on cold, hard figures, rather than your elegant prose. This makes writing sales letters very challenging, but also financially rewarding. In fact, copywriters with proven response rates can earn thousands for a single letter.

There’s a heap of books that cover sales letters in greater depth than you’ll find in this humble eBook. Drayton Bird’s “How to Write a Salesletters that Sell” and Dan Kennedy’s “The Ultimate Sales Letter” are good ones to start with. It’s also a good idea to read books on psychology, salesmanship and direct marketing in the lifelong goal of becoming a master copywriter.

Here I've provided a basic overview, a skeleton if you will, on which you can build as your experience and skill grows. As with most forms of sales copy, the basic structure for sales writing is defined by the acronym AIDA, which stands for Attention, Interest, Desire and Action.

### **Attention - Write a Benefit Laden Headlines that Build Intrigue**

Before you can do any selling, you have to get the reader's attention. You do this with the headline. It's estimated that you'll lose 80 percent of readers if you have a poor headline, so it's worth taking the time to write out as many as you can before picking a winner.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, your headline needs to offer a benefit and build intrigue to maximise response. This could be the offer of valuable information, insights on how to solve a problem or the announcement of a revolutionary breakthrough in the market. Focus on making a clear, compelling promise and sparking the reader's interest into hearing what you have to say.

Whilst the temptation is to show off your creative wit with a droll pun, using humour in headlines risks alienating readers. Some might be confused by your wit, while others won't see the point of reading any further. Leave the clever wordplay to the stand-up comics. We're in the business of selling.

## **Interest - State the Problem and Build Rapport**

*“A copywriter should have ‘an understanding of people, an insight into them, a sympathy toward them.’” - George Gribbin*

After reeling in readers with a benefit laden headline, you need to get them interested in your offer. You need to give them a reason to keep reading and to listen to what you have to say.

Unfortunately, a vast swathe of sales letters fail the moment they start. This is particularly true of offline sales letters from legal firms, financial institutions and other seriously minded businesses. They’ll often open with the same tired old lines on how delighted they are to be announcing their expansion into a new office or how much money they made last year. Do these openings grab you when you read them? Me neither.

Writing openings that focus on the client, rather than the customer, is a mistake for a simple reason: the reader doesn’t care. People read information for selfish reasons. They’re interested in finding solutions to problems or ways to make their lives easier. They’re not interested in your client’s boasts that have no bearing on their life. So let’s be clear, when you open a sales letter you must focus on what the reader wants to know.

## **Focus on the Reader and Build Rapport**

You could start your sales letter by stating an amazing fact, telling a story or posing a question. However you choose to start it, the aim is to build rapport with the reader by showing that you understand the problem they're trying to deal with.

Stating a fact – appeals to technically minded and B2B customers that want concrete facts to support their purchases.

Telling a story – this is great for the B2C market who respond well to stories of how someone, just like them, overcame an obstacle in life to achieve the success, wealth and fulfilment that had previously evaded them. After all, who doesn't want to believe in an uplifting story and that dreams can come true?

Posing a question – Asking the reader a question they're going to agree with is a great way of warming them up to the sale. It helps to condition them to agree with other assertions you make later on, or at least being more open to being persuaded.

After you've got them hooked with an enticing opening line, your first paragraph should then expand on the problem. Stir up the reader's emotions by poking at the issues they have to deal with in daily life which your client's product solves. Discuss their daily inconveniences and frustrations. Get them angry, and remind them why the other options don't work. After you've finished stirring up the reader's emotions, you can hint at the tonic you have to sooth their pain.

### **Desire – Unveiling the Solution**

*“The only way to influence someone is to find out what they want, and show them how to get it.”* – Dale Carnegie

Now that you’ve created interest and intrigue, you need to make good on the promise made in your headline. You now need to introduce your client’s product as the ultimate solution they’ve been looking for, or didn’t realise they needed before they read your letter.

As always, it’s all about the benefits baby. Rather than tell the reader what the product does, focus on how it can help them. Remember, sell them the holes rather than the drill.

Ever since we emerged from caves and formed communities, we’ve been driven by basic human desires of avoiding pain while seeking pleasure. This includes:

- 1) To be fit and healthy – to feel younger, have more energy and live longer
- 2) To be wealthy – to have financial security, the freedom to travel more, to pay for the kids’ education and to be free from money worries
- 3) Better lifestyle – spend less time working and more time on the golf course
- 4) To be more attractive – to look younger, to lose weight, to get noticed and to attract the opposite sex
- 5) Better relationships – to cultivate better relationships in your social and professional life
- 6) To be more successful – To feel more confident, to be more prosperous and admired by others
- 7) Advance in their professional lives – to get a better job, to earn more money, to

improve their skills, to be their own boss and to get more job satisfaction

8) Gain comfort in life – to have the best gadgets and personal possessions. To have the latest version of everything and be the admiration of their friends

You might think that these drives only apply to the B2C world, but the fact is that people are people with the same base motivations. There's always a way of plugging into these basic human desires whenever trying to sell something. Even the blandest B2B products can be given a warm glow when sold with the benefits of saving time and money and making their job easier. This in turn leads to them thinking how they can improve their performance and earn that big promotion or pay rise.

So when writing sales copy, don't tell readers what the product is. Help them to understand what it does and how it can benefit them, harnessing emotional triggers at every opportunity.

### **Address Objections**

After you enter the world of copywriting, it won't be long until you encounter the long versus short copy debate. How many words should you have in an email? How many pages should a sales letter be? There are many arguments for and against, but the common sense answer is that the length of copy is dictated by the amount you need to say to address objections, communicate all the benefits and to convince readers that buying the product is the smart thing



to do.

During the planning stage, write down all the reasons why someone wouldn't buy the product. Is it too expensive? How do they know it works? What happens if something goes wrong? Your sales page then needs to address all these objections with compelling evidence and facts that prove their cynicism or doubts are unfounded.

There's no single rule you can apply to every product. Selling something complicated like CRM software is always going to require more copy than selling cake tins. Copywriting is called salesmanship in print for a reason: it does the same job as your top sales guy talking to the customer in person.

### **Provide Social Proof**

People are a cynical bunch. They are naturally distrustful of marketing, no matter how beautifully worded your proposition. So you have to be able to prove your claims on cost savings, lifestyle improvements and impressing the neighbours. You have to be able to provide the 'social proof' that the wondrous benefits you promise can be gained if they'll just spend some money.

Test results, real life case studies and customer surveys are all great ways of building trust in your offer. Testimonials are pure gold. The client should be able to provide these to you,

but whatever you do don't make them up. Making false claims is now, literally, a crime. Fill your sales pages with lies and invention and you can expect the ASA in Europe or the FTC in America to come knocking on your door.

### **Justifying the Price**

Even after you're copy has lit a firecracker underneath the reader's chair and they're desperate to respond, progress can still grind to a halt over price. This is why it's wise to only starting talking figures once you've backed up your sales page's emotional appeal with logic.

One way of justifying your product's price is to compare it to the other options available. Explain why the other solutions (without mentioning competitors by name) don't work or aren't a good investment. Explain why your product is a good investment based on the time and money it will save the reader, and what additional benefits it offers compared to the competition. One powerful way of differentiating a product is to discuss a particular feature in greater depth. This helps it to appear more sophisticated than that of the competitors, even if it's virtually the same. Complex copywriting can be a powerful sales technique, so I've given it an entire chapter of its own later on.

### **Guarantee**

Another deal breaker can be worry over the product no living up to expectations. They

worry that, if the product breaks or fails to perform as promised, they'll have wasted their money. This is why it's wise to include a guarantee to address this objection and to push a wavering customer into a buyer.

You might think offering a money back guarantee is throwing profits away. But whilst you might receive a few refund requests, the number of additional sales you'll get from giving buyers a safety net if something goes wrong will push the bean counter in your favour.

### **Action – Telling the Reader What to Do Next**

After you've built the reader's excitement about the wealth of rewards to be gained if they just say 'yes', you need to clearly tell them exactly what to do next.

Whether it's entering their email address, calling your sales team or buying that instant, make sure you tell the reader exactly what to do to gain the benefits you've been promising ever since they read the headline.

### **Don't Forget the P.S.**

After the headline, the most frequently read part of a sales letter is the P.S. This is the 'post script' which appears just after the final signature. If the headline has piqued their interest readers will often scroll through the entire letter quickly to help decide whether to read the whole thing. This means they'll often glance over the P.S. once they've got to the end. This is your chance to both persuade them to read the whole letter and to reinforce your product's big

benefit.

Ways of using the P.S. include restating your offer, reminding the reader that you're on their side or to add an additional benefit or making a limited time offer if they buy today, such as a discount or a free eBook.

So that's my whistle stop tour of how to write a sales letter. These are principles harnessed by generations of copywriters to get credit card numbers and to shift products. These psychological tricks can be powerful ways of seducing people to take action. So use them wisely and responsibly.

## **Video Copywriting Basics**

The use of marketing videos has exploded online. More and more businesses want to enhance their landing pages with brief three minute videos (or VSLs, otherwise known as ‘video sales letters’) to quickly explain what they do. Thankfully, the popularity of video doesn’t, generally, come at the expense of copy. The recommended length of a video is 3 minutes max, if not shorter, which places a limit on the amount you can say. This is why video works best when used in combination with sales copy, and can send conversion rates through the roof.

Along with writing with the script, it’s worth considering adding video creation to your services. While there are some very professional video marketing campaigns out there (e.g. Blendtec’s ‘Will it Blend’ series), there are plenty of software tools for creating simple slideshows or animations which can be engaging and relatively simple to produce.

Remember, your video should replicate a face to face conversation. So write the way you talk and imagine the prospect is sat across the table. It’s also a good idea to keep your video clear and to the point, and to follow the conventional format of introducing the problem, explaining why the existing options don’t work and why your product is the magical solution the viewer has been waiting for.

Once it’s in the can, you can edit your video with subtitles or images using Windows Live Movie Maker (I expect there’s something similar on Mac). Another option is to record a

slideshow and then hire a voice over actor to read your script e.g. [voicearchive.co.uk](http://voicearchive.co.uk).

Videos are great for SEO. So once it's ready, share it with the world on sites like YouTube, Vimeo, Metacafe and Dailymotion to draw traffic and customers to your client's website.

## Writing Headlines that Lure in Readers

*“On the average, five times as many people read the headlines as read the body copy. It follows that, unless your headline sells your product, you have wasted 90 percent of your money.”* — David Ogilvy

Writing headlines can be a fine art. But getting them right is worth spending significant time on because the success of your copywriting hinges on whether the headline draws in readers in or not.

Your headline has to act like a town crier, announcing your news and attracting people’s attention with an appealing benefit laden statement that builds interest in what your sales letter, web page or article has to say.

### **Interest = Benefit + Curiosity**

*“If you can come up with a good headline, you are almost sure to have a good ad. But even the greatest writer can’t save an ad with a poor headline.”* — John Caples

People are, by nature, self interested. They will only read your copy if they think it will benefit them personally. So your headline needs to give them a reason to invest their precious time and attention in reading what you have to say. It has to offer a solution to a problem, build

intrigue in some valuable information or offer the promise of making their life better if they continue to read.

Along with being self interested, people are curious. They're interested in reading something that might surprise them or reveal something they didn't already know. Stating an amazing fact or hinting at a miraculous breakthrough can spark people's imagination and excitement at discovering the big reveal. Just remember not to overdo it. Unfulfilled promises and hype can leave readers feeling like they've been hoodwinked, and cause ill feeling that has a habit of becoming magnified in the social media world.

So whether it's valuable information, insights on solving a problem or the big reveal of an insider secret, the best headlines combine the promise of a benefit with intrigue to pull readers through to the first line.

### **Add Sweat, Tears and a Full Paper Bin to the Equation**

Finding the magic combination of words that create magnetic headlines is no easy feat. Many top level copywriters will boast of the hundreds they waded through before finding a winner.

So don't settle for the first headline that comes into your head. Instead write down as many benefit and curiosity laden headlines as you can. Think about what information your



reader wants to know, what problems they are trying to solve or what big reveal will spark the proverbial firecracker under their seat.

The added benefit of writing out a long list of headlines is that they can then be reused as subheads to break up your copy and highlight the key points of your argument.

### **Headline examples for inspiration**

Here are a few tried and tested types of headlines you can adapt:

- Make a bold promise with a guarantee e.g. ‘Play the Piano in Seven Days or Your Money Back’
- Provoke curiosity with a question e.g. ‘Do You Make These Mistakes in English?’ (Maxwell Sackheim)
- Explain clearly what benefit your offering e.g. ‘How to Win Friends and Influence People’ (Dale Carnegie)
- Use a strong verb and a commanding tone of voice (a.k.a. imperative) to suggest what action the reader can take e.g. ‘Win At Poker With These Strategies Used By The Pros’
- Make a bold attention grabbing statement e.g. ‘Amazing Secret Discovered By One-Legged Golfer Adds 50 Yards To Your Drives, Eliminates Hooks And Slices...And Can Slash Up To 10 Strokes From Your Game Almost Overnight!’ (John Carlton)
- Make a no frills news announcement e.g. ‘New Dimoxnyl Hair Tonic Grows Your Hair

and Your Looks Back Overnight!’ (hype like this is normally best avoided, but you get the point)

Writing headlines that will maximise readership is a tricky word challenge for even the most experienced copywriter. So be ready to dedicate lots of notepaper and grey matter to finding the magical combination of words that will pull readers into devouring the rest of your words.

## **Six Ways of Writing Red Hot Openers that Start the Slippery Slope**

*“A good headline gets your foot in the door of the reader’s mind. An unfortunate lead paragraph can cause you to lose a couple of toes.” – Howard Newton, J.M. Mathes, Inc.*

What to say in the first line? Knowing how to start a sales letter is always a challenge. And so it should be, because a weak opening can cost you dear. If your first line doesn’t maintain the interest you’ve painstakingly built with your headline, your reader’s interest can plummet faster than an astronaut strapped to a cannon ball. That’s if people continue reading, of course.

A core reason why many sales letters fail is because too many copywriters write before they are ready. They don’t take the time to distil their thoughts on their message, proposition and why readers should be interested before they put fingers to keyboard.

John Caples in ‘Tested Advertising Methods’ compares the opening paragraphs to how baseball pitchers warm-up. They’ll sling a few down the line before they are feeling ‘red hot’ and ready to throw for real. So it stands to reason that the first few paragraphs of a first draft of a sales letter will rarely set the world of sales writing alight. The copywriter simply hasn’t had time to get into the zone and to get into the groove where they know what they want to say.

The only problem with a warmup is that you can’t expect readers to wait around.

Joe Sugarman in the 'Adweek Copywriting Handbook' said that the sole purpose of the first sentence in an advertisement is to get you to read the second sentence. That is all. It's part of what he describes as a 'slippery slide' where every element must be compelling enough that readers find themselves unable to stop until they're filling out the order form at the end.

But what to write? One simple approach is to carry on the conversation started with your headline. Reward the reader for sticking around by telling them about some of the benefits they can expect to get from your product. But there are plenty of other ways you can get the ball rolling. Here are some powerful ways of writing sales letter openings:

1. Startling statements that challenges the reader's prepositions e.g. 'Losing weight is hard. But the hardest part isn't losing the actual weight it's keeping it off.'
2. Shocking fact or statement e.g. 'Cutting out fat intake from your diet alone doesn't guarantee weight loss success. You could still be storing fat if you consume too many carbohydrates at each meal.'
3. A news announcement e.g. 'Weight Smashers has found a new way of burning twice the fat with half the exercise.'
4. A brief preview of what's in the article e.g. 'Before the internet, the only people working from home were either looking after the house or the children.'
5. A quotation e.g. 'Pain is just weakness leaving the body. We've all heard this in gym a million times. But getting the body you want have to be painful'

6. A story e.g. ‘One Sunday last autumn, I took my son to watch the local junior football game. It was the greatest example of discipline and organisation I’d ever seen. And I’m a sergeant in the army.’

These tried and tested ways of writing openings that are specific, fact packed, that arouse curiosity and create interest. For more ideas, flick through a magazine and see how they take you from the headline to the main body copy. But if you are still find yourself writing openings that feel like ‘warm up copy’, try chopping out the first few lines altogether and dive straight into the good stuff.

*“Too many miss their chance to make a sale by starting with a few introductory remarks that lose the reader’s interest instead of holding it“ John Caples, Tested Advertising Methods*

## **Edit Your Writing with a Hatchet and then a Scalpel**

Getting the first draft done can be a tough slog. To speed up the process and plough through, it can help to give your perfectionist tendencies a rest. Allow yourself the freedom to write naturally, without worrying too much about typos, long sentences or awkward turns of phrase. That's what the second draft is for.

It's true that first drafts can be a clumsy tangle of unrefined words. But the beauty of writing is that you can go back and remould it as much as you like. If the first draft is the act of dumping clay onto the spinning wheel, editing is the sculpting that takes place afterwards. Rather than wait for creative inspiration to arrive, it's typically through delicate moulding and pruning that eloquence and sharp writing will emerge.

Here are my tips for editing your first draft so it's free of flab, verbosity and jargon and can be reborn as an elegant piece of sales writing:

### **1. Read with Fresh Eyes**

After you've finished your first draft, stand up and step away from the keyboard. Go for a walk, read a book or clean the bathroom. Just do something that gives your mind a break from staring at your own writing for the last few hours. You can then go back to it with more objectivity.

It's amazing what glaring mistakes or awkward sentences you'll miss if you don't give your brain a chance to refresh and reread your copy with clean eyes.

## **2. Read from the View of Your Target Reader**

It's easy to get lost in your own writing at times, and to write in way that appeals to you. But what matters is what the reader thinks. Assess whether your writing achieves its objective of projecting an idea, feeling or image onto the target reader's mind

- Does the tone match their personality type?
- Does it risk confusing them with too much technical jargon?
- Is it too corporate? Or too conversational?

Imagine you're reading your writing for the first time and assess whether it makes sense, holds your interest and presents a convincing argument that keeps you reading until the last full stop.

## **3. Trim and Prune**

Clear, concise writing comes from brevity. If you're guilty of using words because they sound impressive, replace them with shorter, punchier versions. Slice sentences of over 25 words into 2 if they can survive on their own. Mix up the lengths and spice up bland phrases to give your writing a sense of pace and rhythm.

Always remember that your writing will fail if doesn't maintain the reader's attention.

Consider the relevance of every single word and phrase. Prune away any fluff and unnecessary words to make your writing tight, lean and engaging.

#### **4. Don't Trust Word's Spell Check and Use the Active Voice**

There are few things that will lose a reader's trust more quickly than sloppy grammar. Always ensure names are spelt correctly, the tense is consistent and commas are in the right place. Scour ruthlessly for typos, and read sentences backwards if it helps. Also check you're using the right contractions (e.g. 'you're' when you mean 'you are').

Writing in the active voice also helps your writing to be concise, punchy and easy to read. The active voice comes from structuring your sentences with the subject coming before the action to make it the sentence's focus e.g.

- Active - Matt has finally joined Twitter
- Passive – Twitter was finally joined by Matt
- Active – Matt will post more messages on Twitter
- Passive – There will be more messages on Twitter posted by Matt

The warning signs of passive sentences are forms of be, such as 'am', 'is', 'was', 'were', 'are', or 'been'. Whenever you see 'by' linking the subject after the verb is always a giveaway of a passive sentence. The passive voice does have its fans though. People in the scientific and technical writing communities often prefer the more ponderous and considered tone of the



passive voice. It can help sentences to sound more objective and fact based, even if at the cost of sounding flat and uninteresting.

## **5. Print it Out and Read it Out**

Like a doting parent, when you've spent too much time with your own writing you can become blind to its faults. After staring at the same chunk of text for hours you can lose all objectivity. What's more, when reading on screen your mind can play tricks on you. You can find yourself missing out words or letters as your eyes skip across the lines and your mind starts to guess a sentence's meaning rather than process every word.

For these reasons, it's always a good idea to print out your copy and to read it out loud. This forces your brain to slow down and verbalise every word, giving you a much deeper sense of how it reads in other people's minds. You'll be amazed at how this will help you to spot clumsy sentences and awkward phrases you never noticed before.

The beauty of writing is you can keep editing until you're happy. Deadline permitting, you can keep revisiting your copy and going through drafts until you can literally feel whether your words will resonate, engage and persuade, until you find yourself nodding in agreement that buying your client's product is the smart thing to do.

## **Do You Want to Communicate or Confuse? Always Focus on the Reader**

*“Our business is infested with idiots who try to impress by using pretentious jargon.” -*

David Ogilvy

The written word is an undervalued asset in the corporate world. Too often B2B copywriting takes itself too seriously, leading to the creation of bland sounding websites, self congratulatory brochures and sales letters which fail to focus on the reader from the very first line. Whether congealed with technical jargon or overloaded with hype filled corporate claptrap, copywriting fails to communicate when it’s trying too hard to sound clever or impressive. Unfortunately, this is a widespread approach that’s deeply entrenched.

You see them everywhere: fingers on chalk board inducing phrases like ‘best of breed’, ‘360 degree thinking’ and ‘paradigm shifts’, misguidedly used because the writer thinks this is how businesses should sound. But using overused clichés merely cripples the copy’s impact. They have been used so many times that any power they once had has since been lost. Instead of sounding smart or inspiring, using clichés comes across as a lazy replacement for genuine thought. They are toothless phrases which lost their bite a long time ago.

When sales writing is bogged down in regurgitated phrases the reader has heard a million times before it has no impact. People’s interest is normally lost soon after the headline, leaving the eyes to scan the page vacantly with no interest in relaying messages back to the brain.

Indeed, too often business writing fails to communicate, but merely bores and confuses.

There is, however, a solution. It's a simple one requiring the merest change in tact. Instead of throwing every superlative at making the business sound grand and impressive, focus on the reader.

### **It's What You Say, Not How You Say It**

As any lawyer knows, it's not the strength of your words but the strength of your arguments that wins the day. The same rule applies to copywriting. Dazzling the reader with flowery language and clever wordplay isn't the best way of persuading them to take action. They might like your writing, but if you haven't given them reasons why they should buy your product it isn't going to succeed in selling anything.

When you address the reader's pain, rather than the business' pride, copy resonates. It gives them a reason to continue reading and to take action at the end. Powerful copywriting also presents them with a logical path of thought. It wins over readers with common sense, proof and conviction. It dispenses with the ambiguous, meaningless words and phrases used to sound important. But instead addresses the reader's pain and then their objections in a rolling series of answers.

### **You Need to Appeal with Emotion and Logic**

After you've been working in marketing for a while, it's easy to become cynical of your fellow human being. You start to regard them as an impulsive species, easily influenced into taking the action you want. All you have to do is find the right part of the brain to prod.

This cynicism comes from the fact that copywriting is rooted in behavioural psychology. This is why, along with books on copywriting, it's wise to read books on psychology and behavioural economics. I recommend adding Roberto Calidini's "The Science of Persuasion" and Dale Carnegie's classic, "How to Make Friends and Influence People" to the pile. These will help you to understand how people reach decisions and what provokes them to take certain actions, which includes the reasons why they choose to buy things.

Rather than blandly list a product's features and talk about it in a matter of fact way, copywriting is at its most powerful when it connects on an emotional and logical level. Making people imagine and feel the benefits they can gain along with justify buying based on logic is the magic combination when it comes to selling. Whether they're stay at home parents or hardnosed business people, everyone makes decisions based on emotion and logic. At its most basic level, people want to avoid pain or gain pleasure.

Time proven buying triggers include:

- Wealth

- Security
- Health
- Admiration
- Attraction from the opposite sex
- Career advancement
- Living a better lifestyle
- Provide for and support your family
- Saving money and time (common B2B triggers)

Copywriting should always focus on avoiding pain and gaining pleasure. These are the base reasons why people buy things. This is why using impressive words alone, rather than presenting a proposition that triggers their emotion and backs up their feelings with logic, is an approach doomed to failure. Instead appeal to human nature and your copy will generate more reads, responses and revenue for your clients.

## **Planning Why You're Writing, Who to and What Action You Want Them to Take**

*"The more informative your advertising, the more persuasive it will be."* - David Ogilvy

Copywriting is thinking on paper and salesmanship in print. Rather than trying to be flashy and extravagant, copywriting should present a clear, logical proposal for buying your client's products. Achieving this doesn't happen by magic but through planning. Before you go near the keyboard, you need to know what you are you going to write. You need to know what series of steps will take your reader from cynical or curious to convinced and ready to buy.

Planning what to write before you start saves a lot of time in the long run. When planning your copy, you need to answer:

- Why am I writing?
- Who am I writing to?
- What action do I want them to take?

### **Why Am I Writing?**

Why should someone agree with your point of view or buy your product? If you don't know, you need to do some research. Tenacious research is about two thirds of the job. You should have more information than you need before you start writing. It's only through

developing a thorough understanding of your product that you'll work out how to make it sound enticing. You need to know:

- What does my product do?
- Why is it better than the other options available?
- What problems does it solve?
- How can I prove its benefits?

After compiling your notes, write an ordered list of the points you need to make to persuade a cynical reader to pull out their credit card.

### **Who Am I Writing To?**

After your product, the second most important factor is your reader. Different people have different motivations and aspirations in life, and will respond to your copy in different ways. To compose a persuasive argument, you need to know what is going to trigger your readers to take action.

Consider:

- What motivates them?
- What are they afraid of?

- What do they want to gain in life?
- What do they want to avoid?
- How can you offer to make their life easier?
- What style of language will appeal to them?
- What objections would they have to buying?

It's through getting inside the head of your target reader that you'll understand what will propel them into taking action. As mentioned elsewhere in this book, in simple terms, people make buying decisions based on:

1. Logic e.g. saving time, money or being more productive
2. Emotion e.g. being more successful, popular or wealthy

When structuring your writing, you need to identify how you can appeal to both.

How can you make them **feel** that buying your product will make them more popular or successful? What are the practical reasons why it's money well spent? Once you've identified the emotional and logical triggers to use to persuade people to buy your product, you're ready to ask them to take action.

### **What Action Do I Want Them to Take?**

Whether you want them to visit your website, sign up for your newsletter or buy that



instant, you need to be clear on what action you want readers to take. This will help to guide you on the amount of information you need to provide and how long the page needs to be. The higher the cost of taking action, the more you'll need to say to convince them of the benefits of doing so.

## **Features Tell, But it's Benefits that Sell**

*"In our factory, we make lipstick. In our advertising, we sell hope."* - Charles Revson

As much as it pains me to admit it, but people don't read sales copy for pleasure. I'm afraid it's true. It's not clever turns of phrase, witty wordplay and imaginative metaphors that keep people glued to a sales page until the last full stop. Don't get me wrong - marketing must be interesting to read. But its core aim is to sell, and for it to be successful it has to satisfy the reader's nagging question: 'what's in it for me?'

Readers want to know how you can solve their problems: How can you make their jobs easier, make them rich or make them a source of envy throughout the neighbourhood? People buy things to gain an advantage in life. This is why it's vital to always be focusing on the benefits people will gain from your product, rather than simply telling them what it does.

## **Features or Benefits? What's the Difference?**

An oft quoted example of benefits over features is that whilst an electric drill might have multiple speed settings and four drill sizes, what people want is an easy way to put holes in their wall to hang their favourite picture.

Focusing on benefits helps to feed on people's emotions because you can project a picture in their minds of the life improvements they can gain. Writing about benefits also helps

your reader to understand the full meaning of what your product can do to improve their life, and not just what function it performs.

### **What Are My Product's Benefits?**

To assess when benefits your product has which you can use to create desire in your target reader, it can be helpful to write lists of:

- The features - what the product actually does
- Why each feature is included and what problem it solves
- Why it solves the problem better than the other products available
- What the customer gains from a problem being solved
- What customer motives does the product appeal to
- How will gaining a benefit make the customer feel

You should then be able to compile a list of the problems your product solves and the benefits customers gain. In the example of a drill, a benefit could be the gratitude for finally hanging the wedding photos or building a tree house for the kids. When writing you'll need to go through each benefit explaining in personal and emotional terms how your product can improve the reader's life. Give them real world examples of someone who's reaped the rewards you promise. Keep piling on the benefits until they cant say no.

So whilst your competitors' bland corporate copy continues to waffle on about cold

features, make sure you're extolling its benefits and the emotional rewards readers will gain from slapping down the cash.

## **How to Use Metaphors to Spark Imagination**

*“Metaphors have a way of holding the most truth in the least space.”* – Orson Scott Card

Whether in Homer’s Iliad, Shakespeare’s plays or Rowling’s Harry Potter, fiction is brimming with metaphors. This is because they stimulate the reader’s imagination and enable them to draw immediate comparisons between two objects based on shared characteristics.

A metaphor’s power comes from transferring the qualities of one object onto another. This enables you to enhance an object’s emotional impact by drawing on the reader’s pre-existing notion of other objects in the world around them.

Metaphors can also make the complex seem simple. They can take a complicated principle and transform it through imagery into a more basic idea the reader understands.

There’s no reason why business writing can’t benefit from a few metaphors. Business writing doesn’t have to be po faced, stiff and serious. It can be far more engaging when it feeds off the reader’s imagination, and adds vibrancy to the mundane.

## **Metaphors Reflect Everyday Speech**

Metaphors mirror the way people speak. By comparing an object or situation to

something the reader already holds to be true you can help it resonate emotionally, as well as add flair and creativity to your writing. Metaphors are also powerful at adding emotional appeal to your argument, through transplanting the properties of more dynamic objects onto the seemingly dull.

Consider how the qualities of objects are communicated from metaphors:

- *“After reading this guide on improving your swing you’ll be firing golf balls down the fairway like heat seeking missiles and landing them with laser guided accuracy.”*
- *“Our varnish gives your roof its own raincoat, and a glossy, shiny one at that.”*

When used creatively and with imagination, metaphors can colour your writing with feeling and paint pictures in your reader’s mind. But also like paint, metaphors should never be mixed. Combining two different metaphors in one sentence just blurs their meaning and lowers their impact.

When writing metaphors it also pays to be original, rather than rely on tired old clichés (although occasionally well worn metaphors can be effective). While inventing new metaphors can be challenging, there are few better ways to spark the reader’s imagination, to add excitement to your writing and give your client’s products emotional appeal.

## **Which Personality Type Does Your Copywriting Appeal To?**

It's easy to assume that your writing will appeal to everyone. It's why you want to write for a living, right? But different people respond to copy in different ways. Some want to know the facts, while others are more interested in hearing a story. So it's important to identify the personality type of your target reader before you put fingers to keyboard.

A good way of discovering the tone and style of writing your customer likes to read is to immerse yourself in their culture. Visit the websites that are likely to interest them, subscribe to some relevant newsletters and browse through the magazines they read to understand how to write in a language that's on their wavelength.

Another way is to assess which personality type you are trying to appeal to. Broadly speaking, people can be pigeon holed into the following categories:

### **Drivers**

- They want to know the bottom line: what results your product will provide, when they can have it and how much does it cost.
- B2B buyers, sales managers and hard nosed business people in general
- Stick to the facts with a pithy pitch, rather than getting creative with your prose

## **Analyticals**

- Facts, statistics and features are what these buyers look for. They want to know how your product works and why it will provide the results you claim, so give them the figures to back up your words.
- Scientists, engineers, technicians, doctors and the systematically minded
- Specs, stats and data. Boast filled success stories will be ignored

## **Expressives**

- Buying decisions are driven by feelings and the desire to buy products that make them feel good about themselves. How can you help them impress the Jones'?
- Designers, teachers, artistic types and the aspirational
- How will your product make them look good? Paint them a picture of what their life could be like if they'd just hand over their credit card

## **Amiables**

- Compassionate and caring. How can you help them solve a problem? And more importantly, how will your product enable them to help others?
- People who deal with people: consultants, HR, public services etc
- Need assurances, so testimonials and case studies will help, particularly if told in the



form of a friendly story

Pigeon holing your target market might seem a simplistic approach to understanding how they think and behave. But trying to please everyone can lead to copy that ends up bland and boring, as it will sound like you're writing to a broad audience rather than to them individually.

## **Fifteen Punchy Copywriting Tips**

It's often said that copywriting can't be too long, just too boring. And sales writing is often only tolerated at the best of times. So if your copy is to weave its magic it needs to be light, easy to read and captivating.

Here are 15 tips for making your sales writing more punchy and compelling for readers:

1. Aim for an average sentence length of around 16 words.
2. Vary between short and long sentences to give your writing rhythm.
3. Split long sentences into two if they'll survive on their own. Use connecting words such as 'so', 'and' or 'because'.
4. Wield an axe to flabby language and unnecessary words. As Anton Chekhov put it, 'Brevity is the sister of talent.'
5. Sales writing isn't blessed with a reader's patience. So ensure every word and sentence means something to the reader and adds to your argument. Don't waffle or descend into a longwinded diatribe that's of little interest to anybody but you.
6. Leave long paragraphs to novelists, and limit yours to a single thought. Two or three sentences is adequate.
7. Showy writing isn't sales writing. Don't use words just because they sound impressive. And leave jargon and corporate claptrap for the brochure (if you must use them at all).

8. Use positive inspiring language on what the reader ‘can’ achieve and ‘will’ be able to do. Avoid negative terms that might dampen their spirits.

9. Break up up your page with subheads and bullets to aid skim reading.

10. Use power words to charge up your writing’s impact, such as ‘revealed’, ‘proven’, ‘scientific’ and ‘breakthrough’.

11. Write in your reader’s language and the style they’re comfortable with. Read your target market’s magazines and newspapers to gauge the pitch.

12. People are hardwired to respond to stories. Use storytelling on how your product has solved someone’s problem to trigger the reader’s imagination and emotions.

13. Use facts or personal history to build rapport, empathy and to show the reader that you feel their pain.

14. Ask the reader a simple question early on they’ll say ‘yes’ to. This will precondition them to be more likely to agree with you and say “yes’ to your offer later on.

15. Sales writing is often compared to a conversation with a pal in a bar. So it should be conversational and sound similar to how you’d speak. Read it aloud to hear whether it flows smoothly.

Another tip I’d add is to keep a swipe file of the best sales writing you find. Study it, highlight key phrases and copy it out by hand. Time consuming, I know, but this helps you plug into the mind of the copywriter who wrote it, and understand how to write in a way that’s easy to read and generates sales.

## **Fifteen Plain English Writing Tips**

Hopefully by now I've made it clear that copywriting's first aim isn't to impress with clever wordplay but to clearly communicate why buying your client's product is the smart thing to do. With this in mind, copywriting is always at its most effective when it's clear and concise. Leave the long winded paragraphs and elegant turns of phrase to the novelists. After all, you're not going to persuade people to buy your product if they don't quickly grasp what you're trying to say.

Unfortunately, there's an abundance of badly written websites. Probably because many business owners think writing is easy and then do it themselves. Why pay a professional to do something you learned at school, right? But having a concisely worded website is a marketing advantage when you can spell out the reasons to buy your product more clearly than your competitors.

I was once asked for advice on improving a property investment website's content. After running a readability test I explained that their visitors would need a Master's degree in advanced philosophy to make sense of what they did. Instead it needed to be simplified and translated into clean plain English if they wanted to convert more visitors into clients.

If you encounter clients with the similar verbosity struggles, here are my tips for making websites easier to read and more likely to be responded to:

1. Aim for an average sentence length of 15-20 words
2. Vary between long and short sentences to help the flow and make your points punchy
3. Assign one idea per sentence, and add another point if it's closely related
4. Write in the active voice to keep your sentences lively, where the object of the sentence comes before the action. The word 'by' in a sentence is always a giveaway that it could be passive and ponderous to read
5. Remember that you're writing for the reader, rather than yourself. Whilst a thesaurus comes in handy for sprucing up school essays, clear writing can be immediately made more complicated when words are added because they sound impressive
6. Don't use long words when a short one will do
7. Avoid slang unless you're trying to get down with the kids, in which case you're trying too hard already
8. People like writing that speaks to them as humans rather than dictates. So use 'I', 'we' and 'you' to keep your writing friendly
9. Don't use technical jargon and gobbledegook, unless they're terms your target reader is familiar with
10. Use positive, inspiring language that motivates readers. Say how your product 'will' solve their problem and how you 'can' save them lots of money
11. Avoid negative words, such as 'can't', 'don't' and 'won't'.
12. Feel free to start sentences using connectors to split long ones in two, such as 'but', 'so' and 'because'

13. Wield an axe and chop out unnecessary words. Brevity is the basis of clear writing
14. Use subheadings, bullet points and summaries to aid skim readers
15. When you've finished, read it out loud. Does it sound natural? If not, refer the points above

To check the readability stats of a Word file go to tools then options then spelling and grammar tab and tick the 'Show readability stats' box. After running a spell check you can then see the number of passive sentences, Flesch Reading Ease score (aim is 60% for plain English) and the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level (a score of 7 equates to a reading age of 12, which is desirable for clear readability).

## Psychological Mind Tricks to Get the Response You Want

In the copywriting world, you're taught to use a combination of aspiration, emotion and logic to get the sale. But there are also subconscious *irrational* triggers at work.

'Behavioural economics' is a framework that has grown in popularity over the last decade for identifying what these *irrational* triggers are and how to use them to boost sales. This framework is such a recent development because the irrational triggers it analyses fly in the face of commonsense or logic, and aren't recognised in classic economic theory.

A popular book on the concept is 'Nudge: Improving Decisions about Health, Wealth and Happiness'. It's believed to be required reading in UK government circles, and Barack Obama is rumoured to be a fan. Maybe there's something us copywriters can use to our advantage.

### 1. Price context/framing

People gauge the value of something based on the other options available. This is why restaurants will stock an exceptionally expensive bottle of wine because it gives context to the bottle below it. It gives a purchase of the second most expensive bottle the feeling of splashing out without going overboard. Similarly, the second cheapest can be a top seller because it feels like you're saving money without being a cheapskate.

## **2. Fewer choices make it easier to buy**

In an experiment, one shop sold 24 types of jam while another sold 6. The shop selling 6 jams outsold the other shop by 5 times. Why? Because if you give people too many options it makes it harder for them to reach a decision. It simply increases the variables in play and the potential objections to each choice.

## **3. Power of the default option**

When you give people an automatic default option it gives them a sense of ownership. It feels like something they already have. The sense of loss people feel from giving up that option is stronger than the sense of gain. So if there's a particular option you want to direct people towards buying, set it as a default.

## **4. Make the cost less painful with delayed payment**

This is a trick retailers of high price products, like sofas and high end TVs, have used for decades. Offering delayed payment reduces the pain people feel at the point of purchase. They don't feel the sense of loss of money being sucked from their bank account at that moment. Delaying payment softens the sting and makes it easier for people to say 'yes'.



These tactics are used by canny retailers every day to subtly nudge shoppers into making more purchases. So it's worth considering how you can harness price context, limited choice and delayed payment in your next sales page to drive up response.

## **Conversational or Corporate?**

Should you write the way you talk? Many copywriters certainly think so. Conversational copywriting is an informal style that mimics the way you'd talk to a friend, but with all the 'ums' and 'you knows' taken out. Readers find it easy to read because it's a friendly and fun way of writing. It also offers many benefits when you're trying to sell something.

People don't like to be sold to. But they will listen to friendly advice. Conversational copywriting can swoop under the reader's radar, scanning for sales spiel, and project your pitch in a way they find comfortable to read and can connect with. It talks through your product in a positive light that doesn't force the message, whilst projecting empathy for the reader's problem at the same time.

Conversational copywriting is, however, not to everybody's tastes. In the B2B world it can be regarded as unprofessional and not the way a serious business should sound. Instead, many prefer to adopt a tone they think sounds impressive or important. But when you're writing copy for your own benefit, rather than the reader, you can be left with a convoluted soup of jargon and corporate speak ('best of breed' is a particular pet hate of mine) that's difficult to read and fails to maintain the reader's attention or interest.

I think we can all agree that whether you're writing for moms at home or business executives, you're still writing for people. When you remove the business suit and tie, you're

still left with someone that has daily problems and challenges they need solved. This is why writing in a way they can relate to and comes across as a one to one conversation is always going to be more effective than the dry corporate style.

Thankfully, the new breed of startups and solopreneurs seem to get it, and want a brand brimming with personality. It's just the old guard in their secluded offices who have yet to evolve with the times.

So, that brings me to the end of my final copywriting coaching lesson. I hope that writing for your audience is one of the key insights you take away with you, and it's a principle that helps you to consistently deliver copy that delights customers and clients alike. Remember that becoming a copywriter is a lifelong undertaking and that you'll continue to build your knowledge through studying the copywriting masters, following what today's top copy dogs are doing and building your knowledge in psychology, salesmanship, marketing and the myriad of topics that can help you become a better writer.

If you've found this book useful, I hope you'll consider subscribing to my blog for more of my insights on copywriting and growing your freelance copywriting business:

[www.copywriterscrucible.com](http://www.copywriterscrucible.com)

Good luck!

Matt

## About the Author



Matt Ambrose is head copywriter at The Copywriter's Crucible. The Copywriter's Crucible helps businesses to find their human voice and communicate in a clear, ethical way, free from hype and corporate claptrap. Their approach has generated excellent results for clients, particularly those in B2B sectors who struggle to communicate in clear language customers understand and relate to.

A full service marketing agency, The Copywriter's Crucible provides complete brochure creation, website development, video marketing and copywriting for direct marketing campaigns. They'll even boost your ranking in Google, if you ask them nicely.

Matt launched The Copywriter's Crucible in 2006 after having a vision of what his life would be like if he didn't abandon the corporate ladder he was on. Throwing caution (and his company pension) to the wind, Matt traversed onto a ladder he knew he'd enjoy climbing. And so, The Copywriter's Crucible, a melting pot of punchy, persuasive copywriting, was born.

If you've got a product and need help kickstarting sales and plotting a course to world domination, get in touch for a free proposal on how Matt and his team can help:

[www.copywriterscrucible.com](http://www.copywriterscrucible.com)