

The art of copy: 10 tips for writing great copy

By  David Edworthy

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"I apologize for such a long letter - I didn't have time to write a short one." - Mark Twain.



Photo by [Kaitlyn Baker](#) on [Unsplash](#).

Writing great copy takes talent - yes, but it also takes time. This is why so much of what we read today in advertising is just wallpaper. It's one of the biggest problems that I have seen with digital advertising. In the digital space - it is often more important that you have said something, than if you have something to say... think about that. We all know people who do this in meetings. People who pipe up at the last minute just to feel like they are part of the conversation, but who honestly have nothing really valuable to add. Don't you hate those people? Then why do we think it's okay to do this when speaking to a consumer?

I remember once reading that it is only once your traffic lady has gone blue in the face and your art director has taken up drinking, that you should consider starting. And even then, you should only consider it... for a moment. The reason for this is simple - it allows you to filter out all the nonsense that your audience don't really care about. So that when you do finally

start - you're able to be more articulate, be more creative, and be more rewarding.



Ten tips for excellent copywriting

Lauren Crooks 24 Oct 2017



With that in mind, here are my 10 rules for writing great copy:

1. Copy should be rewarding

It should inspire, motivate, inform, make people think, draw people in, enlighten, lift up, or make people laugh. It should not bore. Advertising is a form of entertainment.

2. Use adjectives sparingly

Yes, you're trying to convince someone to buy something, but don't sound like you are. Lee Clow, one of advertising's greatest Creative Directors, says that you should put down what you absolutely have to say, then stop. Genius.

3. Punctuation matters

Terry Pratchett in his book *Maskerade* says that "Multiple exclamation marks are the sure sign of a diseased mind". Wikipedia's summary of this quote says it best - "The basic idea is that a person's sanity is inversely proportional to the number of exclamation marks they use!" And guys, an ellipsis has three dots. No more, no less.

4. Say one thing

Single-minded propositions don't have the word 'and' in them. Again - this is from the genius of Lee Clow. In fact, just download the book *LeeClowsBeard* [here](#). It has absolutely everything that you'll ever need to know about advertising.

5. Tickle their intellect

Your audience is not as dumb as some people think they are. Your audience is not the lowest common denominator. I've seen this scenario play out a million times in a boardroom. You pitch an ad that gets a great reaction - everyone in the room is taken on a journey and moved in one way or another. When everyone is chatting about the possibilities of what this could mean for the brand, the aforementioned person (who hasn't said anything up until this point) pipes up and says "I just don't think that our customers will get it". We need to realise that people rise up to a challenge - no one likes to be spoken down to. In fact, in the book *LeeClowsBeard*, he says "Consumers never complain about ads being too smart". Really, do yourself a favour, get the book.

6. Stick to the rules

Unless you have a very good reason for breaking them, don't. Yes, Shakespeare made up or introduced 1700 words into the English language... but he was Shakespeare.

7. Never repeat yourself

If you write it properly, you won't need to. Your copy will be memorable enough.

8. Find your voice

Yes, you need to write on behalf of a brand and if you're good, you'll be writing for lots of brands so you may need to tweak that voice. But good copy is not sterile - there is a person behind it. As there should be.

9. Entice people

Leave them wanting more - that is the best call to action you can hope for.

10. Refer to number 9

No one woke up this morning aiming to be mediocre. Let's write copy that meets them where they're aiming.

ABOUT DAVID EDWORTHY

I'm a freelance copywriter who has worked for some of the biggest advertising agencies in the country. I have experience in above and below the line advertising - having won awards, locally and internationally, for both. I think that the ad industry, as it stands, is broken and it can't be fixed using the same thinking that got us into this problem. Things are going to change. I want to be a part of that.

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