

10 Copywriting Tips to Help Your Marketing Sound More Human

Marketing means lots of different things to different people. To some, it's simply another term for advertising. To others, it extends beyond advertising to all forms of business promotion and communication. But whatever your take on marketing, one thing is certain; language and the art of persuasion hold the key to communicating with your audience.

Marketing and your brand

At Caboodle, we believe marketing is the most obvious, accessible and vulnerable incarnation of your brand. While it doesn't define your brand, it's more than simply a vehicle for your branding – it's everything and anything that you put out there, into the big wide world. It projects your image. It communicates your thinking. As such, the language you use across your marketing – from press ads to TV, from on-hold messages to 140-character tweets – is vital in shaping the way people think and feel about you, your business and your products or services.

Enough of the theory

With our brand vs marketing rant out of the way, here are our copywriting and marketing consultants' top 10 tips for giving your marketing a more human, empathetic and engaging tone of voice.

1 – Think before you type

If I walked into your place of business with a stopwatch and a potential customer, and I gave you 10 seconds to convince them to become a paying client, you'd want a bit of time to think, wouldn't you? You'd want to gauge your audience, organize your thoughts and get your message straight. Well, copywriting is exactly the same. Take a minute to think before you start bashing your keyboard.

2 – Write to someone and use 'you' in your copy

Copywriting isn't simply about spelling and punctuation. You're trying to connect with someone, so imagine a client (or potential customer) sitting in front of you. How would you talk to them? You wouldn't just reel off the benefits of your business offering. You'd try to engage them, woo them. You'd appeal to their emotional right-brain, as well as their logical left-brain.

3 – Just do it already

Remember writing that all-important essay at school? The opening paragraph always seemed to be the hardest part. One way around this is to forget it, or at least not get too hung up on it. If you're not sure how to start, sketch out the thread of your argument. Try writing the bits you're comfortable with. Once you've got something down on paper (or up on your screen) it suddenly becomes much easier to fill in the blanks.

4 – Getting it wrong is OK

Don't be afraid to get it wrong. Even the best copywriters have to rewrite things – edit, refine and improve. In fact, that's the discipline that distinguishes the best writers from the hoi palloi.

5 – AND, OR and BUT

When you were at school, your teacher probably taught you not to begin a sentence with a conjunction (or conjunctive), such as 'and' or 'or' or 'but'. Well, your teacher was wrong. People don't speak as if they are Victorian English teachers, so why would you want to write like one? And besides, conjunctions at the start of sentences are everywhere – your newspaper, the latest best seller, right through to Chaucer and the Bible. If it feels right, do it. Or don't, it's up to you.

6 – Punctuation: the key to personality

Punctuation ties people in knots. Where do I put a comma? When should I use a full stop? Truth is, punctuation isn't something to be feared. It should be embraced. It helps people make sense of what you're saying. It helps you inject personality.

Sometimes, you might require a more formal style, like this, with a series of clauses created using commas. Other times, you might not. Clipped sentences might be better. To help you make a point. Like this.

Don't be afraid to experiment and ask other people for their opinion.

7 – Questions engage your audience

Questions are great, aren't they? Haven't you noticed? If someone asks you a question, they're immediately engaging you, especially if it's a question that calls for more than just a 'yes' or 'no' answer. When was the last time you were asked a question that made you think?

8 – Cut it by 30%...then another 30%

When you think you're finished, think again. Chances are you can cut your word count by 30% without losing any of the good stuff. With attention spans shrinking all the time (thanks Mr Internet) people are becoming less and less likely to read long copy. So keep it short. And sweet. Be ruthless – lose everything that's unnecessary.

9 – Give it the 24-hour test

When you've cut your word count by 30%, then by another 30%, it's time to relax. Put your masterpiece to one side and forget about it for a day. When you come back to it, you'll find that it's much easier to spot all the little mistakes and even ways to restructure the content to make it better, more succinct, more interesting and compelling.

10 – Read it out loud

OK, so you might feel a bit stupid reading your copy out loud, but it's the best way to make sure it sounds natural. If you stumble or struggle with a sentence when you're reading aloud, it probably needs to be reworked.

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