THE SMALL BUSINESS GUIDE TO

Writing Copy That Converts

No doubt, when you sit down for a one-to-one conversation with a prospect, you can explain yourself clearly, build a great relationship, and there's even a good chance you come away with a sale.

But for some reason, many of us can't translate that genius to our marketing copy.

On one hand, the thing that makes a person a great writer is a mystery. Some people have the gift; we can safely admit that. However, it doesn't mean that you either have it or you don't. Anyone can invest a little time and energy into upping their copywriting game and bring their writing from ho-hum to juicy, fan-winning copy that converts.
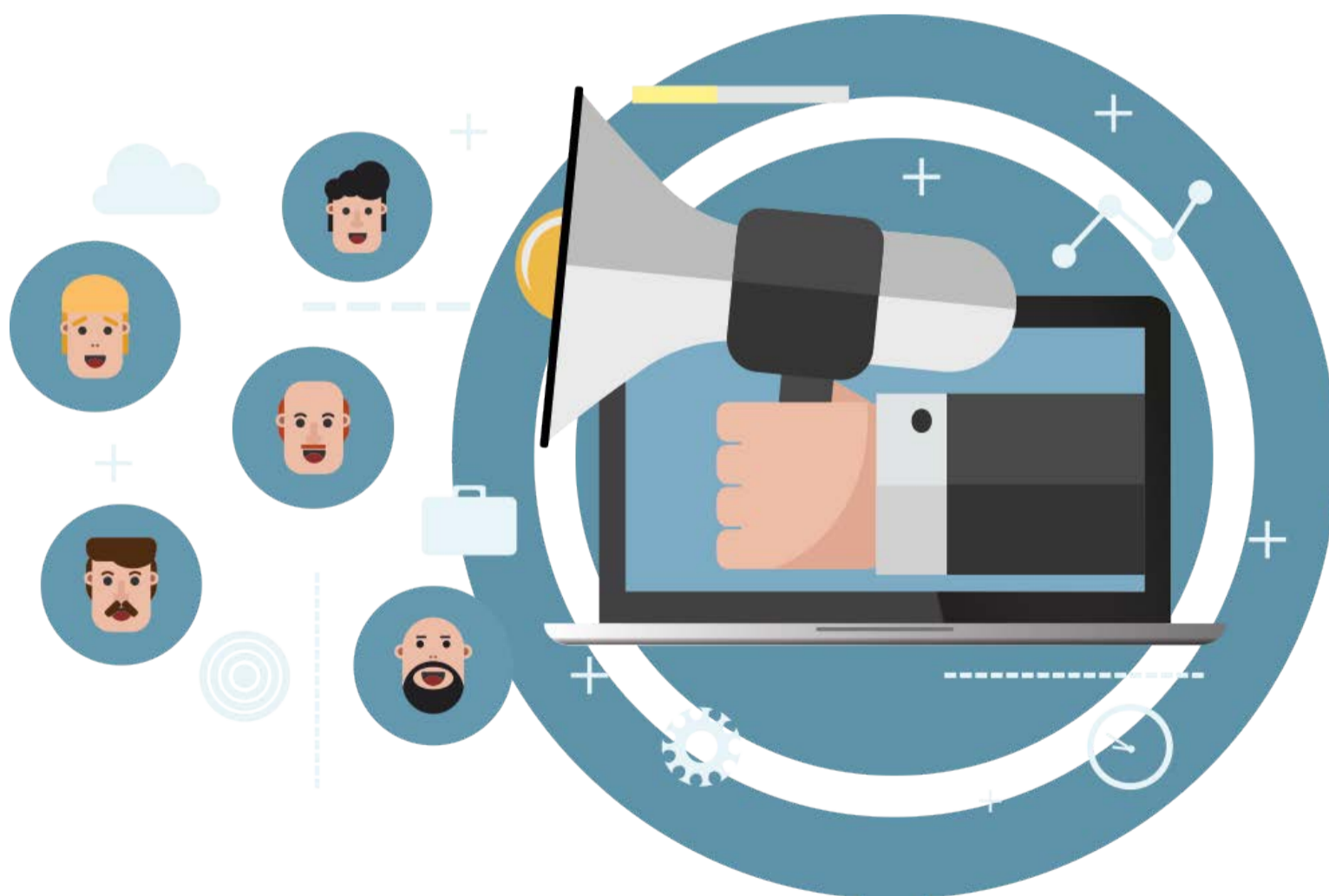
Why is it Important to Put Out Great copy?

Because great copy makes money.

Wherever you deliver your message—your website, blog, social media—your copy stands in for you. Your copy represents you, working to bring your prospects closer to a sale with each interaction.

There's a lot of competition for your audience's attention online. Bad copy just doesn't compete, plain and simple. When your copy is bad, it will cost you money. On the other hand, great copy is magnetic: It engages its audience, seducing them and delivering what they want, in the way they want it, so they want more.

While copywriting tends to be one of the biggest stumbling blocks for most small businesses, it doesn't have to be.

Will AI do it for you? NO, not unless you understand what I'm talking about here. AI is amazing for spewing out content quickly, and the grammar is spot on, but the magic comes from the instructions you give it.

We've come up with a few solutions that will help your copy shine right away. And when your copy shines, you'll see results right away. Then automate AI.

More leads, more sales, more revenue.

Focus on Relationships, Not Sales

The number one rule to writing great copy is to remember that you're writing for people. And people are relational. Brands that recognise this and meet people on a human level are the ones that succeed.

The relationship is how prospects and customers distinguish you from all other businesses online, and they rely on that relationship to measure their trust in your products and services.

People follow a distinct path on their journey to buying your product or hiring your service. It's not unlike the journey we take in our dating relationships; we start with interest, spend time discovering each other, and when we're ready, we make a commitment.

Each stage of the relationship defines the interaction. Buyers do the same. They start with a problem, spend time researching options, and once they've established trust, they'll commit to a purchase.

This path is called "the sales funnel." We use this term because many show interest, but as they interact with your brand, some will lose interest or buy elsewhere, honing your prospects down to the ones who will commit to purchase from you.

Each business' funnel is different. Some are short - like a retail ice cream shop. Most people walk in the door ready to buy ice cream. Only a few walk in the door, discover they can't buy a burger, and leave.

Some are long - like a Bahamas cruise ship. Many people look online for answers to questions about holidays. They take months, maybe years to decide they will take a cruise, specifically to the Bahamas.

The cruise company must have copy targeted to prospects in each stage of that funnel so that their brand is front of mind when those prospects decide on a Bahamas cruise.

Just like your relationships, you can't rush the transition to commitment. You wouldn't bring a diamond ring to a blind date, right? Likewise, you can't push a sale when the prospect is only just learning about you.
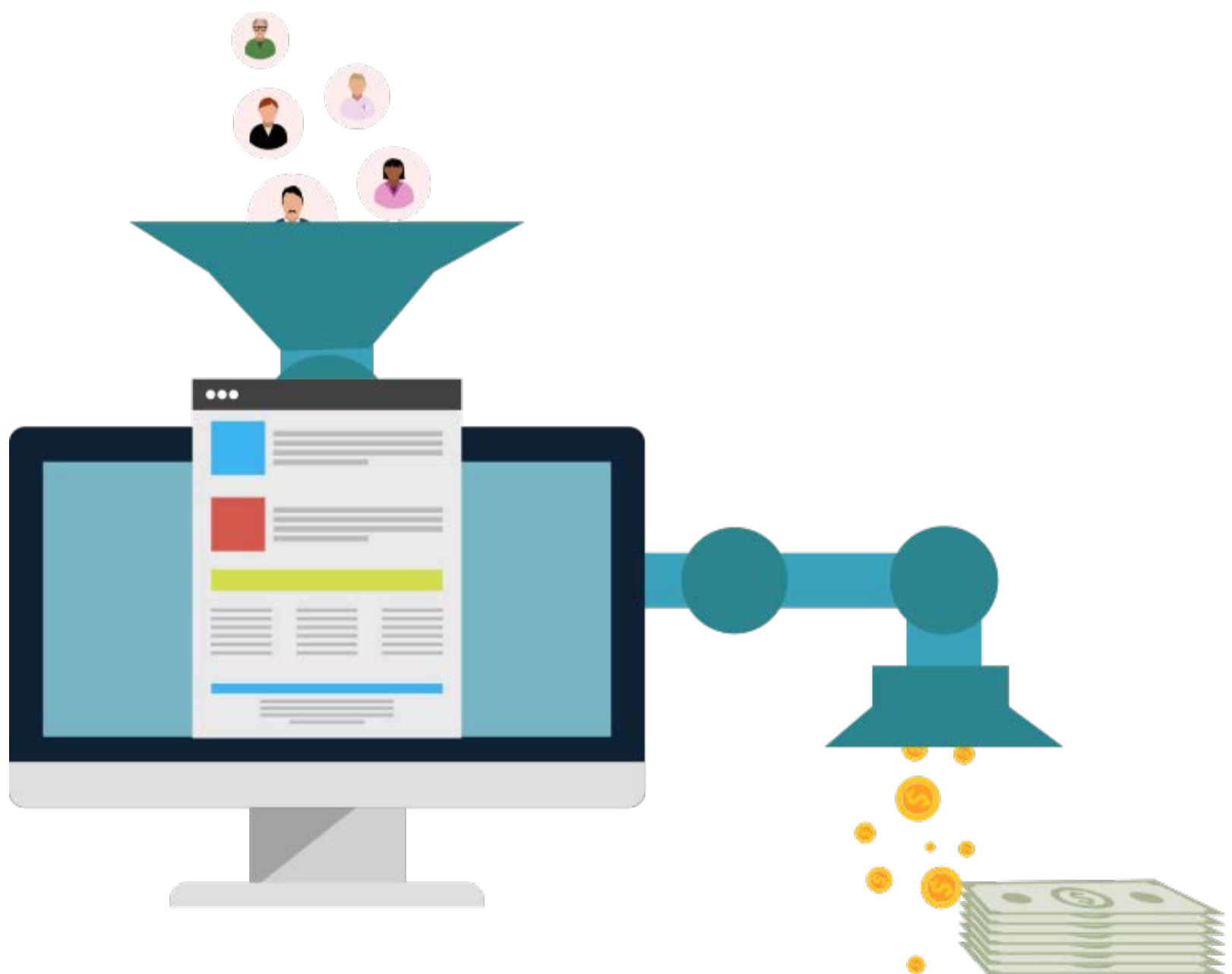
Sure, you want them to buy from you, and so your first instinct may be to cut to the chase: "This is what I'm selling, want to buy it?" Just keep in mind, context is important.

Sometimes, it's ok to be "salesy" but in general, when you're writing copy, the sales-sounding stuff should be relegated to a very specific product page and other content targeted to the bottom of your sales funnel, where your audience knows that they are there to be sold and are ready to buy.

The more you understand where someone is in their buyer's journey, the better you can concentrate on building the relationship appropriately, the better chance you'll have of creating copy that moves them down the funnel and converts.

If you forget the relationship aspect, your copy will be so over the top that it will turn into a late-night infomercial, or it will be so boring that it becomes like the dusty reference stacks of the library.

Find Your Voice

Because you're writing for people, you need to sound like a person. The best copy can be read aloud and will sound much like how you speak. That, in turn, gives your writing personality, and makes it accessible.

Punctuation is your friend in this regard. The purpose of punctuation is to break up a sentence, to allow it to read more naturally.

Commas represent real pauses, opportunities for breath. Full stops give readers a chance to think for a second about what was just said. When you use punctuation strategically, you can harness your own voice and make your copy shine.

Most importantly, mix up your sentence length. Use short sentences. Interject, now and again, a complex sentence in order to build some momentum for your idea. Then round it up with another simple sentence. This creates a casual, yet intelligent rhythm to your writing.

Likewise, pay attention to vocabulary. You should use words that your audience will understand and which you would use yourself when speaking to a prospect. You want to sound accessible and professional.

Give your copy the "read aloud" test. Listen to yourself read it. If it sounds natural and human, then it's probably on the right track. If you couldn't hear yourself saying it to a prospect, then it probably needs a little more work.

Avoid simple mistakes

Spellcheck exists for a reason. Pay attention to it. On the other hand, be wary of the grammar checker.

Sometimes, the best grammar will sound too formal for the style you're going for. Other times, poor grammar practices will make you sound, shall we say, less than educated?

You need to understand the basic rules of grammar before you can bend them. If this is not your strongest point, you should get some feedback from your resident grammar nerd before you publish your copy.

Looking for a quick solution to your grammar woes? We recommend Grammarly. You can run your copy through their service to find errors and learn how to fix them.

Personality Trumps the Professor

People like simplicity. They like cleverness. But they don't have the time or patience to decipher your attempts at being a professor.

There's a difference between a stuffy professor who talks down to the people around them, and one that loves to teach and is excited to see students learning.

One is stodgy and uninteresting, who uses unnecessarily complicated words to show off how intelligent they can be. The other lights up the people around them, using complex language only when it's necessary.

Save those big, condescending words for something else—like your letter to the bank.

One-to-one Conversation

It's easy to fall into the trap of thinking you're writing to a broad audience because you're hoping to get as many eyes as possible on your copy. But the reality is that when someone is reading your copy, they're only thinking of it as a one-on-one conversation.

It's important to make your copy feel personal and focused on the reader, not just your broad audience.

Think of your communication style as less like a speech to the United Nations and more like a dinner party at a friend's house.

Make your reader think that this email, Web page, or letter was created especially for them. Every interaction builds your relationship, and it will help you down the road when it's time to convert.

As an example, rather than write, "Small business owners don't have enough time," you might want to write, "Don't you hate that the feeling that you never have enough time?"

Did you feel the difference? One states a fact about a broad audience; the other personalises that fact and delivers on an emotional level.

The Long and Short of It

While there isn't an exact formula for how long or how short your copy should be, there are some acceptable lengths to which you should generally adhere to. When you're considering length, use the following to help guide you:

Consider the form:

The form you're writing for often determines length. Twitter copy is always limited to 280 characters, but blog posts can vary wildly. Landing pages are often limited so that they fit on a single screen. The best emails are mindful of the reader's time and quickly get to the point.

Consider the message:

Your copy length should fit neatly into your overall message. Longer copy can be used to offer in-depth analysis or solutions, but if the message can be conveyed in a shorter form, keep it short and sweet.

Consider your competitors:

Keep an eye on the copy your competitors are putting out. Their successes can help you find out what works.

Consider your history:

Which of your pieces are most successful? Take a look at their length and write to that length again. If it works, keep doing it! If not, make one small change where you think the problem might be and test again. Keep going till you get the results that you want.

No matter what length your copy is, you have to get your message across quickly. Readers don't have the patience to scroll through fifteen pages of fluff just to get to what they really want. Each and every word should be considered and valuable.

At the end of the day, word count means little compared to quality messaging. So cut the fluff, and focus on quality.

Highlight Benefits, Not Features

You're passionate about your products and services, and it's natural for your enthusiasm to show. But when it comes to marketing copy, your products and services on their own aren't the most important things you can discuss.

You'll want to be sure that your prospects can find your products and services, but you shouldn't saturate the rest of your copy with product talk.

Your product page lists all the great things that set your products apart from the crowd. When your marketing strategy calls for content about your products, use those opportunities to show how your products benefit people, not just what they do.

Everyone wants to know, "What's in it for me?" When your copy focuses on the benefits of your products, it answers the question before they have a chance to ask.

Get Them To Do Something

This guide has spent a lot of energy talking about how your copy should reflect your relationship with your audience and not sound "salesy." Does this mean you should never ask your readers to do anything?

No! Great copy always makes an ask, just at the right time and in the right place.

Your copy is only as good as the action it inspires. A copywriter's job is to create an action, plain and simple—to convert, convert, and convert some more!

The question is, "What do you want your readers to do?" It's not always a sale. Maybe it's to download an e-book, to get a free analysis, or to sign up for your newsletter. Each of these is a relationship builder.

Whatever you ask, you have value to provide. Your audience has pains they want fixed, and they are looking for your solutions, so you should provide them in whatever form appropriate. And when they're ready, sell to them.

Take for example the landscaping company who's looking to increase sales. The copy they provide addresses the pain points that their customers experience. One potential customer searches online for the best time to prune a cherry tree and finds one of the landscaper's blog posts on the subject. The searcher is not ready to hire a landscaper, but appreciates the trustworthy advice.

At the end of the post is a call-to-action (CTA). A CTA like "Click here to sign up for our monthly garden care package," would totally miss the reader's readiness to buy, and would not likely lead to a sale. However, a CTA that invited the reader to download an e-book on fruit tree maintenance would add even more value, and would be an opportunity to get an email address to add them to a campaign for other landscaping tips. The possibilities open up, and as the reader continues to interact with the landscaper, it will become more evident when they are ready for a call from a salesperson.
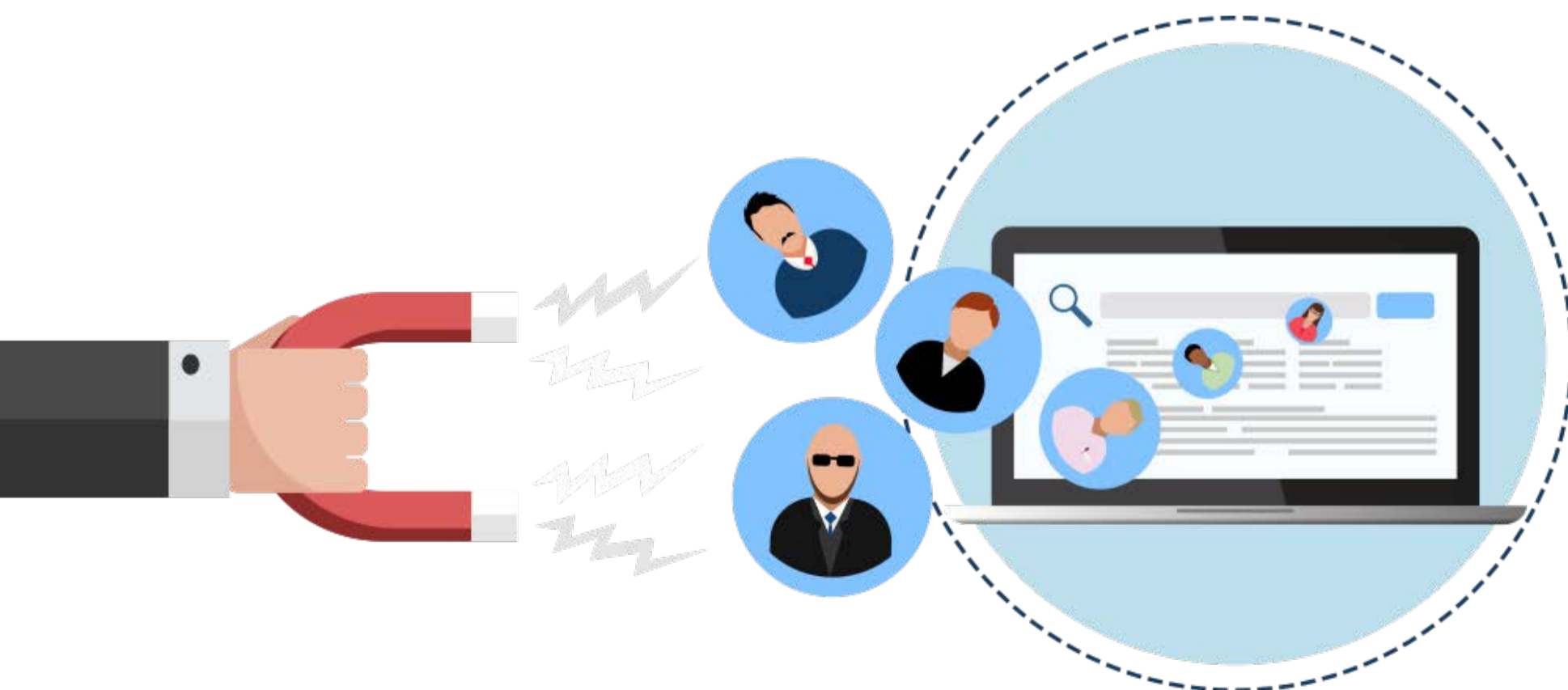
Some tips on how to create a great CTA:

- Use calls-to-action that multiply the value. If the blog post offers a partial solution, offer a webinar on the subject with an expert.
- Just because it's a CTA, doesn't mean you can slack off on your copywriting skills. Dry, dull calls to action don't get clicks. Be creative with your CTA; inspire them to click.
- Be clear. Your audience doesn't want to be surprised by what's on the other side of the click. State exactly what you're asking of them, and exactly what they'll get in exchange.
- Excite their interest. The best CTAs add an element of curiosity. Phrases like, "Dying to know more about ____?" or "You could be missing out on_____," etc., tease the reader just enough to spur them into action.

Be sure you track your interactions. If they've been interacting with you, they're starting to show readiness to buy your products. You don't want to miss the opportunity to connect them with sales; not after all that work you've done to prepare them for that moment!

Words, Words, Words

Much of your success as a copywriter depends on the words you choose. But you don't need to be a walking dictionary to craft great emails, sales letters, landing pages, website content, and other collateral that will convert. Instead, just know that practice is the key to success.

This is what Napoleon Hill says about the importance of choosing your words:
"Think twice before you speak because your words and influence will plant the seed of either success or failure in the mind of another."

When you really know your audience, you know how they speak. You know what they read. Your job is to choose words for your copy that line up with what you know about your audience.

If you write copy for a law firm, you don't want to sound like you sell surfboards; instead, you want to select language that instills confidence in your understanding of the law.

On the other hand, if you do sell surfboards, your copy had better overflow with energy.

Technical terms that are specific to your industry show that you know your stuff, but be sure to write to your audience. In all cases, you need to balance technical terms with definitions; you write for your audience, which means that you need to be cool, and define your industry acronyms and buzzwords.

Are you using the right words? It's worth a second look at your copy with this question in mind. The right words will help you:

- Stay welcome in your prospect's inbox (because they actually read what you send them)
- Position yourself as the expert (because they know you have something important to say)
- Make a bunch of sales (because you'll stay in their minds until they are ready to buy)

A Copywriting Checklist

As you write, follow this simple checklist to make sure your copy shines and that your message gets delivered. Before you know it, the principles in this checklist will become second nature, and your writing will improve.

1. Overall Tone

The writing is casual and avoids formal clichés

Less effective:
"This email is to inform you of a special offer we are extending to all …"

Better:
"We're excited to tell you about a special offer …"

The writing feels more like a conversation I would have with a person in a restaurant than a speech I would give to a crowd of 1,000

Less effective:
"AAA Pest Control is the best solution for residential and commercial …"

Better:
"We've helped hundreds of homeowners and businesses …"

My personality is reflected somewhere in the copy

Less effective:
"Thank you for your consideration."

Better:
"Can't wait to see you in the shop!"

2. Content

There is enough information in the opening sentences to tell the whole story

Less effective:
"Back in 1942, the world was in crisis. There was a feel of uncertainty…"

Better:
"The events of 1942 changed financial planning forever. A+ Financial is committed …"

The bullets are complete thoughts that pertain to the intro sentence

Less effective:
"There are three things every homeowner should know about insurance:
• Homeowners should get insurance
• It's the law
• What about taxes?"

Better:
"Here are three things you should consider about homeowner's insurance:
• You may not want your bank to pay the bills
     Many lenders will include your insurance payments in the escrow account…
• You may not have as much coverage as you think
     The standard insurance package you selected may not include flood…
• You might be paying too much
     There are many hidden fees that insurance companies attach to…"

I have included subheads/titles for people who simply want to scan the document

Less effective:
"We provide an all-in-one solution for business owners looking for social media, PR, and community recognition. We also specialise in …"

Better:
"All-in-One Communications Solution …"

The copy includes a clear call-to-action

Less effective:
"Our website has additional information."

Better:
"Visit our website for more info."

3. Mechanics and Readability

I checked the copy for spelling/grammar errors

Less effective:
"Your going to LOVE our new kitchen applances"

Better:
"You're going to love our new kitchen appliances."

I replaced the big words to improve readability

Less effective:
"Your windows will rapidly shine with immaculate clarity."

Better:
"No more spots … no more smudges. Just a clear view of the world."

I read through the copy and deleted unnecessary sentences/ thoughts

Less effective:
"Your will is extremely important. It is essential to create a will that …"

Better:
"It is essential to create a will that …"

Someone else has read my copy to check for flow and readability

Less effective:
Save. Send.

Better:
Save. "Can you look over this email to see if it makes sense?" Revise. Send.

"But I Don't Have Time to do This!"

Your copy is important. It has to engage, hold the interest, and build your relationship to your prospects and customers.

If you reached the end of this document, and you realise that you don't have the time and energy to produce the best copy, you still need to find a way to get it done for your business.

We've provided some solutions to help you outsource your copywriting.

For quick jobs, you can find a freelancer via [Upwork](). You simply post your job requirement, and freelance copywriters reply with bids. It's a speedy way to get copy when you don't have the time to do it yourself.

For larger projects, you'll do best to outsource directly with a freelancer or an agency. This way you can develop a consistent voice across your copy. On top of that, when you work with a freelancer over a longer term, they'll learn your business and your strategy well enough to take on projects with minimal hassle. That kind of relationship will save you invaluable time and energy.

If you want to make sure you're getting the right copywriter for your job, keep in mind the following:

Tips for working with freelancers

1. Be ready to pay a fair rate

You know the old saying: "If it seems too good to be true, it probably is." It's tempting to cut costs and take the cheapest offer, but that other old saying tends to be true, too: "You get what you pay for." Make sure you're basing your choice on the quality of the freelancer's work, their recommendations, and their relevant industry experience.

2. Outsource in bulk

You're most likely to admit you need help when you're up against a deadline, and the pressure is on. But if you can do it, you'll get much more bang for your buck (and a lot less stress) if you can outsource in chunks. The more lead time you can give a freelancer, the better the quality, and most importantly, you can establish a good working relationship. And remember: If you're a high value client, you'll be right at the top of their list, which means you'll have better luck getting results in a pinch every now and again.

3. Be clear—and get it in writing

Your concept makes perfect sense in your head, but a phone interview doesn't guarantee that your copywriter got it. Always give clear instructions and a specific written brief. Set your expectations in stone: Even if you agree on a handshake over the phone, back it up with an email to avoid misunderstandings and costly wastes of time.

Pro Tip:
Make it easy to seal the deal. Create a creative brief template with a few short paragraphs about your business concept, style guides, etc. that you can quickly update and fire off to every outsourced copywriter.

Communicate

Outsourcing freelancers is not a "set it and forget it" kind of relationship. Communication is critical to the success of your outsourced copy editing. If you fail to check in with your freelancer, you could get a product that misses the mark and a looming deadline that leaves no time for revision. There are tonnes of tools you can use to communicate with and manage freelancers effectively. One good one is Asana.

Feedback

Make sure you always give honest feedback. This is the lifeblood of an ongoing relationship with a freelancer, and the best ones will always welcome some constructive criticism. Build that relationship by mutual respect and not only rewarding hard work, but also helping your contractors become more efficient by being honest about what hasn't worked, so that next time, it will!

Conclusion

Don't make this harder than it needs to be. You know how to speak to your audience; you just need to translate that charisma to your written copy. Write for your audience like you would talk to a friend. At the centre of your communication is your relationship with your audience.

As you focus on developing quality, engaging copy, you'll see your conversion rates improve, your bottom line increase, and your stress levels go way down.

Write copy that knocks their socks off.

Need our help?...
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Written by Ben Snedeker at Infusionsoft and adapted by Flow Online.