



Copywriting is no funny business

One of the major pitfalls for any copywriter is trying to be funny. The reader might appreciate a humble attempt at livening up their day but 'funny' can simply get in the way of key messages... And the audience, the final and most important judge, will lose interest quickly.

The problem is that the main purpose of marketing copy is to sell (either directly or indirectly) a product, concept, brand or service. And selling is no laughing matter.

The reader doesn't want to be 'entertained' by the process of spending their hard earned cash. They want to spend their money on the things they deem necessary or that meet a specific need. And the same goes for business budgets. Most companies would really rather keep their cash on their profit line rather than spend it on a new fully integrated print solution or an innovative IT system (or whatever else you're trying to sell to them).

So the words need to work hard - there's no time to waste on punch lines or jokes. Every 10 words need to speak 1,000. The text needs to grab attention, and pull the reader in word by word. It needs to tell them exactly why they can't live without the latest high-tech telephone system or what really is so great about signing up to a newsletter about chickens (for example!).

If you can squeeze a quick pun in, great – but is it really adding anything? If the answer is no, take it out. If your bit of fun is just a way of filling space, stop. The important part is to sell your products and services, so be clear, crisp and to the point.

Besides, consider this... What's funny to you isn't necessarily going to tickle every potential reader (or potential purchaser of your product or service). Making a joke about teenagers lying in bed all day isn't necessarily going to appeal to a 15 year old, however much it amuses their parents. So be careful.

Make sure you know your audience. If you're 40, married, with two kids and a semi-detached house in the suburbs; and your audience is 18, obsessed with Facebook and only interested in what's happening at the weekend: your sense of humour is probably not going to match. You need to step into *their* shoes. Focus on what benefits you can offer them. And most importantly, don't try to be funny if you're not!

So what can you do to liven up that sales letter, press release or website?

Well for starters you should make sure every benefit stands out clearly and simply. It's about them not you, so make sure they know how much better life is going to be if they buy from you.



Make them not just need your products or services, but *want* them too. Emphasise the points that make you different from your competitors and tell your potential customers exactly why that is such a good thing.

Shorten sentences, play with words and add punctuation do whatever you can to get your messages across clearly.

It's not difficult to understand, but putting what you know into practice is. So when you've finished writing go back and read it again with these key points in mind.

1. Write an informative and clear headline – no matter what the subject area, a clear headline can make all the difference. Make sure it tells the reader everything they need to know in one big hit.
2. Write short snappy sentences. Keeping the word count down will automatically make reading more fun.
3. Make sure your offering is clear and accurate – don't confuse people with cultural references, not everyone will have the same taste in music, comics, films etc as you.
4. Use bullet points – these are almost always read so always remember to make the benefits stand out.
5. Have a clear call to action. Tell your reader what they should do next and with a sense of urgency, don't leave them guessing as they may just forget all about you.