



How to choose a copywriter

So, you've decided to enlist the services of a professional copywriter! Great. Now you just have to choose one... How hard can it be?

Enter some combination of 'copywriter, location and marketing' in your chosen search engine and you'll be inundated with writers, all vying for your commission. Some local, some national, some international; some working out of offices and some out of student bedsits.

So lets start narrowing it down.

How important is location anyway?

Not very. Copywriters work just as well remotely. We like getting together with clients, but even if we don't have that luxury, we'll spend plenty of time talking things through with you on the phone. The best copywriters invest almost as much time in teleconferencing than they do in actually writing. So test your prospective copywriter on this point. How do they acquire the information they need? Will they arrange a fact finding interview at the outset? Will they be contactable when you need them?

What's their line?

Granted, copywriters all write – but they don't all write the same sorts of copy. If you want B2B make sure you choose a B2B not a B2C specialist. There is a difference. Similarly with new media.... Beware the website copywriter who can't show you lots of examples of well written web copy. Online writing is a different and constantly changing skill set. You'll need someone is up to speed on what that means otherwise you'll just end up with 'brochure-ware'. And no enquiries.

You need it *when*?

Sometimes it happens. Sometimes marketing copy gets passed from pillar to post before it finally ends up on your desk. Probably with a note saying 'Can you get it finished by this time tomorrow?' stuck to it.

It's not ideal, but copywriters can often help you out of a sticky corner. But be careful. Rushed, unfocused and inaccurate copy is worse than none at all and will take you longer to rectify. If your copywriter says they can squeeze it in, fine. But do make sure it's not at the expense of a thorough fact-find. Do make sure you brief fully. Above all, make sure your expectations and their ability to deliver on those expectations match. If they don't, your copy won't work the way you want it to.

In most cases though, there's more time for the niceties (and necessities) of milestones and proposals. Every time you commission copy you should expect a detailed proposal outlining



precisely what your copywriter is going to do for you. This makes the whole process so much easier. It avoids any uncertainty on their part, or yours. It puts everyone on the same page.

Just how good are they?

Check out their testimonials. Better yet, check out testimonials from customers in your field. If they can't manage that, ask your copywriter for testimonials from customers who've commissioned similar projects.

And don't stop there... What's the work actually like? Ask for samples. And ask what the original client objectives were so you can judge whether they were met (remembering the acid test is 'did it do the job' not does it meet your needs - it probably won't). Is your copywriter adaptable? Can he or she adopt the right tone of voice for your customers or business partners – or both? Is their copy compelling?

What about accuracy? Look out for common mistakes. Are there any spelling errors? Does the punctuation measure up? Look for consistency too. Are abbreviations consistent? Is the company name always in upper case, or a mixture?

What about cost?

That old bugbear. Effective copywriters will articulate marketing messages clearly; they'll put across your company professionally; they'll even improve order intake. They charge accordingly.

Beware budget price copy – unless you're prepared to accept cut-price results.

Can you work with them?

Never ever underestimate this one! If you can't stand the sound of them; if they irritate or annoy you, try someone else; with the best will in the world, it just won't work. In theory, you shouldn't have too many problems. Copywriters deal with a lot of people – in a lot of different industries. Most of them should be able to hold up their end of a conversation and make you feel like a valued client.

Time invested in choosing the *right* copywriter pays off. Both in terms of time saved and potential revenue generated.

The ultimate rule of thumb is this: don't settle. Don't settle for less than perfect work. And don't settle for a copywriting company that's not prepared to meet *your* objectives, to *your* timescale, to *your* precise specifications.