

How to Wind Up With Copy That Really Sells

Contributed by Dan Kennedy
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Dan Kenney has been writing copy for over 30 years. To some, he is considered a bit of a rebel. To others, he's an inspiration and their guru. Love him or hate him, Dan Kenney is the highest paid copywriter in the world (so far as we know). Even if you don't like him, you'd sure better listen to him if you want to make good money as a writer.

Big
Lessons From 30 Years' Freelance Copywriting:

HOW

TO WIND UP WITH COPY THAT REALLY SELLS I got my first paid, freelance copywriting job 31 years ago.

I have since written copy consuming a forest of paper, for product from the mundane to the weird and bizarre, for every media, including print ads, direct-mail, TV infomercials, and the internet. Here are a few of the most important things I have learned.

Never Trust The
Client. Or Yourself.

Even the poorest, most impoverished, homeless person still has a wealth of one commodity: opinions. Every client I've ever worked with has been rich in opinions and beliefs about his customers and prospects, prices, competitors, etc., a goodly portion of which have been proven wrong. Most people confuse their beliefs with fact. This is why unfettered testing is so vital in direct marketing. It also links to one of my favorite marketing principles: the only votes that count come with dollar bills attached to them. Years ago, I got to know a very talented psychic who performed at all the Playboy clubs. People put questions they wanted answered into a hat. He tossed aside any not folded up with money. We should do the same with the opinions about our marketing in general, our copy in specific from employees, spouses, friends, peers, and anyone other than a real customer voting by buying.

Write Like Ya Talk

Doesn't matter if you are selling fractional jet ownership to a highly sophisticated Fortune 500 CEO or a tote-the-note used car on weekly payments to a high school drop-out. You write like real people talk, over a beer or a cocktail. Never how English teachers write. Selling via copy is selling, and selling is a personal, person to person exercise requiring rapport. This is a difficult thing for a lot of people to grasp, when they believe their clientele is different. In truth, no clientele is different.

Never Take Readership
For Granted

One of the biggest flaws in many sales letters is the presumption they'll be read. People have to be compelled to read. They have other things to do. They ruthlessly discard things unread at every opportunity.

Even when writing to an audience that has great affinity, that is responsive, that are already good customers, you dare not assume readership. Whether by gigantic, irresistible promise, arousal of intense curiosity, manufacture of extreme fear, delivery of major news, clever gimmick, or other strategy, you must stop the reader in his tracks, get him reading, then keep him reading. People who attempt writing copy without successful experience selling face to face or to groups, from the platform, are at a disadvantage, because they do not have the skills nor the ingrained, automatic behavior of

keeping the other person "on the hook";, paying attention, interested.

Move Methodically Forward To The Call To Action

By all means, tell interesting stories, draw analogies, be entertaining, make the reading/buying experience fun, but never let any of those things become the point. Nothing has merit unless it moves the reader further along towards the action you want him to take, in an organized, straight path.

Don't Be Subtle.

Don't Wimp Out.

For 9 consecutive years, in my life as a speaker, I spoke 25 to 27 times a year on programs with Zig Ziglar. Most people know Zig as a great motivationalist. Fewer know him as a hard-core sales trainer, yet his book "Secrets To Closing The Sale" should be studied and used by every copywriter. Anyway, one of the things I got in my head in my late teens, then listening to Zig's tapes, was: are you a salesman or a professional visitor? If you don't close, you're just a visitor. In your copy, you have to close. To directly, clearly, forcefully tell the reader exactly what you want him to do and when and how to do it. Most ads and sales letters wimp out at the end.

Prove Your Case Every Way You Can

I'm constantly dismayed at seeing lots of ads, sales letters, catalogs, web sites absent testimonials, absent media quotes, absent scientific facts, absent illustrations.

It is foolish and arrogant to think you will be believed because of your own copywriting eloquence and brilliance. It is lazy not to get all the proof you can. Specific to testimonials, what a customer says is 1000% more persuasive than what you say, even if you're a 1000% more eloquent. Of course, there can be bad testimonials. Plain vanilla, uninteresting, attesting only to adequacy. You have to concern yourself with both "quantity" and "quality" of proof. But as illustration of the importance, I'll tell you about an infomercial I worked on. In its first version, it was about 50% interview of the person behind the product, 50% testimonials, and it flopped. In its next incarnation, 30% interview, 70% testimonials, and it nearly worked. Finally, at 15% interview, 85% testimonials, it worked wonderfully. And the person being interviewed was a trained, skilled, exceptionally effective "pitchman" in other venues.

Use A System For Writing

Unless and until you have written copy for years and years, a lot, so that your subconscious has internalized all the disciplines and checklists, you should consciously adhere to a step by step system, and go through the same steps in the same order every time. Spontaneity is vastly overrated, especially for really important, like piloting an aircraft, open heart surgery or writing sales copy. In my book "The Ultimate Sales Letter", I lay out the step by step system I

used religiously for the first dozen or so years. Every good copywriter I know has a sequence of things he does in the same order, each and every time. And if you need to be prolific and fast, this is even more important. Copywriting is not really a creative activity, and should not be approached that way. It is a mechanical activity; basically using templates and tested, proven strategies,

devices and hunks of copy, stitching it together, then smoothing out the rough edges and the weld spots, finally getting it all into one distinctive voice. In a creative activity, you might want to start with a blank piece of paper. In copywriting, you do not.

Dan Kennedy is the author of the book *The Ultimate Sales Letter* and numerous other business books. Find info at NationalSalesLetterContest.com, NoBSBooks.com and dankennedy.com.