

# What makes good copy?

## Copywriting: a beginner's guide

OK - so you know that copy is the single-most important aspect of your website, and that weak copy not only makes your organisation look unprofessional, but actively sends customers racing towards your competitors – but do you know exactly what makes good copy?

Copy, by its nature, has a job to do. You pile on a heavy load: great expectations and ambitious sales targets, and the copy carries you there. At least, that's the idea.

To explain what makes good copy (the stuff that sells) let's first look at bad copy.

### When copy goes horribly wrong

Imagine: you're stumbling through the web, searching for a solution to a problem. Your problem? Huge phone bills. So you go looking for cheaper calls. You know that Skype, or Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) offers cheaper telephony. So you search...

You click a link, and start reading the copy:

“VoIP Solutions for Business and the 21CN  
We provide Business Critical VoIP Solutions.  
Our Hosted PBX VoIP Solution provides everything a small business requires. We also provide SIP and IAX trunk services, Telephone Numbers and all supporting services.”

You are left bemused and confused by a series of unexplained acronyms: “21CN”, “PBX”, “SIP”... You click back to the search results and try another website.

### Missing the point

This example demonstrates several common copywriting mistakes:

- Unexplained acronyms
- Focussing on product features rather than benefits. Who cares about ‘hosted pbx solutions’? People just want cheaper calls!
- Forgetting what's important to the customer. You may care about the fancy technology, but your customer doesn't.



## Good copy – a recipe

Writing copy isn't about amazing people with clever word-play or an impressive vocabulary. It's about clear, purposeful communication. Good copy has the following:

### Vitality

If your copy has energy, your readers will be propelled towards your beautifully-timed call to action (call to action is the marketing jargon for a command such as 'buy now' or 'subscribe here').

### Clarity

If you start talking about IPX and QWZs, people will tune out. Give people language they understand, and talk about the things that matter.

### Persuasiveness

To achieve your aims, copy must persuade an audience. There are well understood methods for achieving persuasive copy, which copywriters should understand.

## How to judge copy

Whether you've employed a professional copywriter or had copy written in-house, it's always a good idea to personally review the words that work for your organisation. You don't have to be a professional copywriter to assess copy.

When reading, ask yourself these questions:

- Does it grab my attention?
- Does it make sense?
- Will it be understood by all the people we want to communicate with?
- Does it answer my questions?
- Does it alleviate my concerns and fears?
- Does it ask me to do something (like buy or subscribe)?
- Does it provide a compelling reason to buy?

## Copywriting Dos & Don'ts

### Do

- ✓ Write in plain, simple English.
- ✓ Break down complex ideas into short sentences.
- ✓ Make clear, compelling offers.
- ✓ Write about a product's features as well as its benefits.
- ✓ Use sub-headings to separate chunks of text.
- ✓ Turn lists into bullet points.

### Don't

- ✗ Use jargon or management-speak.
- ✗ Write in long sentences.
- ✗ Forget to think about your reader.
- ✗ Try to hide behind fancy-pants language that you think makes you sound important and clever.
- ✗ Write about what matters to you, using the language you use in-house.
- ✗ Overwhelm people with large chunks of text

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### Further reading/links:

- [Writing for the web](http://www.kendallcopywriting.co.uk/wp/wp-content/uploads/2009/01/writing-for-the-web.pdf)  
www.kendallcopywriting.co.uk/wp/wp-content/uploads/2009/01/writing-for-the-web.pdf
- [Copywriting Tips for Online Marketing Success](http://www.copyblogger.com)  
www.copyblogger.com
- [Divine Write Copywriting Blog](http://www.divinewrite.com/blog)  
www.divinewrite.com/blog