

Copywriting Checklist

by Chris Crossland

There's a well-known expression that "there is nothing new under the sun" and it describes perfectly that many of the things that we see and desire are clever reinterpretations of ideas that have gone before. One way of doing this is to review something against a set of benchmarks, and then seeing if you can change something to make it better or more effective.

So here is a simply checklist that you can use for almost any item of online or offline marketing communications - I use it as a guide when reviewing clients existing marketing collateral – the secret is to be really honest!

Initial Impact

Nothing works in isolation. The overall impact of any marketing material is critical, so design, feel, choice of media, media delivery, timing, relevance, copy, immediate message, and many others factors are all fundamental and none can be considered in splendid isolation. So take the item you are reviewing and ask yourself is what you are looking at really the very best expression of your product, service or idea. If it's not then what's wrong, and if you can't work out what's wrong, get some advice or do some research and find something that is better.

Headlines

As a general rule if you have your company name as a headline you are wasting your money and might as well give up. Yes it might make you feel good, but no-one cares. Same applies to headlines within the item you are reviewing; use them to focus attention on the core messages you wish to communicate – they are the sign posts that guide the audience. Headlines are important.

So what?

At the end of every paragraph or bullet point - ask yourself the killer question – So What? This will help you change and change again until you have in a

few words that identify what makes your product or service valuable. Sadly in my experience many products and services that are offered are based on smoke and mirrors and are actually pretty weak. The better news is that with a bit of creativity most businesses can find a USP and then have something of value to market and believe in.

Say it out loud

Read the copy, and if possible read it out loud and ideally to someone else. Many of us "hear" what we read, and we all communicate through a combination of what we see and what we hear. Saying the copy out loud gives us an idea of how it will be perceived. This can lead to the use of fragmented sentences, and the occasional break with traditional grammar – but that's how we communicate and if it's done well can make complex ideas easy to grasp

What do you want to happen?

No really – what do you want the person to do when they interact with your marketing collateral. It's called "the call to action" – so what is it? If it's an enquiry you need, it's possible to pre-screen those enquires with appropriate copy so that those enquires are closer to a sale than before, or you could be asking for donation to a charity in which case the method of donation might make all the difference.

The whole picture

This is especially useful if you have been established for a few years. Clear your desk and put down all the different items of marketing “stuff” you have created. Does it look like a patchwork of different ideas and approaches? Or does it look like all the items came from the same stable? Nothing dilutes a brand identity than lack of consistency. Now fire up the web and take a look at what you have on the desk set against your online presence – it’s all part of the same story – your story, and the tone and core messages have to work together to create the perception you need to be successful.

Comfort

There are basic building blocks in every communication that makes the prospective reader feel that they are engaging with a business or individual who has integrity and value. First up are

clear and unambiguous contact details – that still includes a landline number and full postal address – if you just have a mobile number you look weak and superficial, non-permanent, and lack credibility. Next, if appropriate offer free quotations and guarantees, and add some testimonials that have real names and company details. Free samples, free information like this checklist all help – it’s about establishing credibility and building trust without commitment.

And Finally

Is what you are looking at something you are proud of? Does it do you and your business any favours? Does it change the way your prospective or current customers perceive you? Does it fit well with what has gone before and what you plan for the future? If you can answer all these with a smile on your face and a warm glow in your heart then you have produced something that will do you no harm now and into the future.

If you need any help with the above, or would like a FREE review of an item from marketing toolbox then please get in touch

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