

How To Write Irresistible Ad Copy

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How To Write Irresistible Ad Copy

When selling through advertising, you're faced with two options, both of which you will probably use frequently. Those options are display and classified advertising.

We won't deal here with radio and television copy writing because it is not something many of you will be using until you have developed a great deal of mail order experience. Once you're dealing with that sort of capital investment, you'll probably have an intimate understanding of the fact that expert help is essential to the successful launch of any campaign, and frankly, electronic media are not our field of experience.

Classified ad copy writing is a very exacting craft, not an art in the way that display advertising is. It involves following a few simple guidelines and requires little skill. That's why daily newspapers hire school and college students to take orders - and write - for their classified section over the telephone.

The first point worth noting is that classified ads are sold by the word or by the line. This has a bearing on how you write your ads, because if the ad is sold by the word, you're not going to write an ad that has a bunch of "a's" and "the's" in it. But at the same time, if it's sold by the line, it will be worth your while to include these words in the ad, as they'll appeal to the better educated segment of the market.

So an ad in at so much a line might read:

"The hottest thing in years. This is a household wonder you'll cherish for years."

The same ad at so much a word will read:

"Hottest recent development. Cherish this household innovation for generations."

Both are about the same length. The first reads nicely in proper English and the second used big, powerful words to make up for awkward structure.

When you buy by the word, which will be the case in most markets, use the biggest, most action-packed words you can think of. And while we're on the subject of word count, the way you mark your address in a classified is also important.

If you live on Dog Breath Lane, mark your address as 22 Dogbreath, unless in that subdivision, there also happens to be a Dog Breath circle, a Dog Breath Avenue and so forth, in which

case Dogbreath Lane will do. You can usually get away with this ploy, since these ridiculous two name streets are there to sell houses, not to please the Post Office. If you live in Apartment 12, you can usually get away with 12-22 Dogbreath, which saves you another word. Never leave out the zip code, even a nine-digit zip code counts as one word and in many publications doesn't count as a word at all.

The initials of your name or company will also do unless you're trying to project an image, and this can save you from one to three words. Even your last name will be all right.

In most magazines and a few newspapers, your first word or line of type will be set in darker bold letters. Choose that first word or two very carefully. If you really want good results, do exactly the opposite of what most other advertisers are doing, or be different.

If you've got an income opportunity and CASH, MONEYMAKING or INCOME are the usual first two words, be a bit creative, perhaps with BROKE (no more! Try selling doogles! or HORRENDOUS) (budget, a thing of the past.)

The first word or line gets your reader interested, and no matter how large the circulation of the publication, you'll suffer terribly if you're not attracting the reader as well as the other advertisers. Those opening words are crucial. Like the man said, you don't get a second chance to make a good impression.

Once you've made the hook, hold the reader by telling him exactly what you're offering. If it's an ad for more information, let him know what kind of information and where it leads. Then drop the cost on him, if any and your name and address. If it's a product, in words that say a lot. It's fine to pussyfoot in a display ad if you can afford the space, but short, sharp, to-the-point is what sells from classifieds.

One minor point or style to remember, if you're offering a bonus, leave it to the very last. "Bonus with..." won't work. A bonus or free gift is offered for one reason only: to hook someone who has not quite been sold by the rest of the ad. The offer of a bonus won't work UNTIL they know what it comes with.

Writing display ad copy is much more involved and should really not be undertaken by even the brightest English graduate without some expert help. As we stated earlier, ad copy writing is one of the highest-paying of the creative professions, mainly because it is so difficult to do.

If you must do it yourself, here's a few things you can do to make the task a bit more successful.

Making use of the techniques we mentioned earlier, determine which benefit your client is like to be most interested in.

Target the emotion that motivates the need for that benefit in most people. If you can do that, you'll hook the right person for the product. If you're selling runless pantyhose for example, you know the anti-run characteristic motivates the buyer, and the reason why women want to buy anti-run hose is to look better longer.

Hey, there's the lead for your copy! In big letters, you're going to flag your ad with LOOK BETTER LONGER! You might want to bracket it top or bottom by writing in smaller letters:

"Da-don't-run-run hose will help you "LOOK BETTER LONGER" in the Da-don't-run-run hose." If the client is interested in runless hose, you've got her. If not, forget it. Anything else you could use to get a client who doesn't wear pantyhose will cost your clients who do use them, and that's a waste.

Once you've got the initial benefit out in the open, either explain it or be very sneaky about adding another. So say:

"These pantyhose will give you the confidence in your appearance you won't get with other pantyhose..." or

"LONGER... and without blowing your budget. These will give you the confidence..."

but the best way to sneak in additional benefits without looking pushy is to say:

"LONGER! Without blowing your budget, these pantyhose will give you the..." using the new benefit as a prefix.

And, oh, it's so much more complex than that. It's obviously a development in synthetic fibers that allows those hose to be superior, so that must be included too, because the customer wants to know why they're so good.

Where do you mention it though? It might be just as effective to get to it right after the heading, in this manner:

"LOOK BETTER LONGER! Thanks to a new development in synthetic fibers, Da-don't-run-run pantyhose will give you the confidence in your appearance you won't get with other pantyhose."

Then the money aspect. And how do you do that? Do you make the sentence longer or start a new sentence? YOU MUST WEIGH EVERY WORD WITH A SURGEON'S CARE! And what about a coupon at the bottom?

Do you use a small order form or use the address of the company?
How many words do you need, and if you need a lot of words, can you afford the space it will take to print them?

Get a word count, and fix it within fairly narrow limits or you'll bore the reader or leave no room for graphics or blank space, which you must have to some degree for proper esthetic effect.

Speaking of graphics, what will you have to use? Will you have to make your own? (Clip art used by most dealers is horribly tacky.) And heaven forbid, you design an ad based on another successful campaign by another firm with similar products... and it works well that it sends their sales rising! It could happen.

There are many firms, probably even in small cities, that specialize in print media advertising, and many do excellent jobs.

You in Canada are fortunate, especially if you live in Toronto, Vancouver, Montreal or Calgary, since talent runs cheap in Canadian advertising firms and you can get excellent work, and we're sorry to say this but it will generally be more creative than American agencies of similar size.

The fact remains, though, that you know your product better than the agency, and you probably know how you want to sell it.

You might have ideas for wording, graphical layout, any number of things. If you truly want to make your campaign, and especially at that crucial first campaign, as profitable as possible, use the services of a graphics firm that composes print advertising at the very least, and ad agency at the best.

By the way, we've discovered a lot of graphics houses have some frustrated ad copy writers who can give you expert direction at low cost if you'll only ask.

Be ready to take in all your ideas at the time you get your ad done. Every bit of work you do yourself should come off the bill you'll be paying for the job, since it cuts the time the agency or graphics house has to take to prepare the ad.