



Is your website copy letting you down?

Are you losing valuable sales, because your copy fails to connect, engage and SELL?

Pretty much everyone who visits your website, is a potential customer.

They are a sale, waiting to happen.

That is, if you treat them right - and give them what they are looking for.

Your visitors have decided to have a look at you, because of something they have seen, heard or been told about.

Or, they may be holding that business card you gave them at a chance meeting on a train, or at an event, a few days ago.

Whatever the reason, they are visiting your website, because they are interested.

Does your website greet them warmly and make them feel they are in the right place?

Does your copy connect and engage with them in the right way?

Most website copy these days, does none of those things. Just as with most copy we see in marketing and communications these days, copy on websites is mainly dross.

Companies spend fortunes with so-called experts, to get an all-singing, all-dancing website – and then accept poor – or at best, workmanlike copy, as part of the package.

They then spend thousands - millions sometimes - on promotional activity in a wide selection of media, all geared to drive people to their website. And when people get there, they are not engaged - and they leave.

It is quite astonishing to me, I have to say.

Your website can't sell a prospect as well as your top salesman could, face-to-face, but it should come pretty damn close.

Does your website copy do that?

You can have the most stunning layout, the most appealing shade of background colour, the easiest navigation bars in the history of the world - but if your copy isn't on the money - your website is going to underperform and eventually disappear without trace.

You can invest in all the latest trends and devices to drive people to your website, but if your copy doesn't connect and engage, then you are flushing your money down the pan.

And your job, more than likely.

Words do the selling, remember? How many times does it have to be said, before it registers?

Let me tell you this. Copywriting techniques that sell offline, will sell online too.

Surprised? Why would you be?

Whether traditional or digital, selling is all about *communication*. You can't sell anything to anyone, unless you can correctly communicate the benefits of your products or service, in the most effective way.

It seems to me that everything we hear about these days, is traffic. Traffic, they tell us, is the key to online success. People spend fortunes on it.

Total tosh. The key to online success is sales. Without sales, you die.

You can have great advertising, an effective off and online strategy and generate significant traffic from everywhere, but if your website copy can't engage and interest your visitors when they get there, they will leave.

And they'll probably never come back.

This reminds me of a great piece of advice I got from the greatest retail direct marketer of all time - Murray Raphael. Over dinner one night in London many years ago, he came out with this gem.

"Never make the story, bigger than the store".

"I have seen loads of companies running great promotions, promising this, that and the other", Murray told me. "Promotions that excited people. Yet, when they got to the store, the experience was nothing like that which was promised.

So, they left without spending a dime".

"What's more, they shared their disappointment with many others, effectively damaging the company even further".

The same thing is happening today, with websites.

If you're honest, is it happening with yours? Does your website disappoint, because your copy isn't good enough? If it does, here's some valuable advice.

The first thing you need to do, is realise that the power of copy is just as important online as it is off it. So you need the very best, if your website is to deliver for you.

The *very* best.

This means that if you give your vital copy brief to your website designers and specialists, or your local (or in-house) nerdy anorak, you should be certified and taken away by the men in white coats.

Because, it's a racing certainty they'll screw up. And the reason is very simple.

These dorks can't write good copy. It's impossible. They don't know how.

What's more, they are useless at spelling and haven't got the faintest idea about punctuation. Giving them the copy brief, will put you in hospital with a stress-related illness.

Using your media agency for web copy is likely to end up in tears, too. They are used to writing 'telling' copy, not 'selling' copy.

And 'telling' copy is useless in a selling situation.

So, if you want your website to deliver more sales, then give your website copy briefs to someone who really understands how copy works.

Preferably someone with a direct marketing pedigree.

An individual who has had to SELL for a living. Someone, as David Ogilvy used to say, "*who has tasted blood*".

When you do, you will find your copy will work much more effectively and sales will start to increase.

You will turn curious browsers, into lucrative business and sales.

Would you like to know how you could achieve that?

You do it by using the right words, in the right way. By doing this, you will have achieved the first goal. You will have made your website welcoming, warm, attractive and relevant.

Your visitor will feel they are in the right place. And that's a really good start. But, never forget - the sales message is paramount. This means your copy has to SELL.

Use all the proven copywriting techniques I have been writing about in this column for decades. They are all on my website. Just look around and you'll find what you need.

Remember - what works offline, will pretty much work online.

Note the similarities here, to proven offline disciplines.

1. Make it easy to read and understand. Use simple words.

Use simple, concise, easy to understand words and you'll do much better than if you try to be clever and intellectual. Your copy isn't written as an artistic endeavour. It is written to build your business.

Use words that the reader doesn't know or understand - and that reader will hate you, not buy from you.

Fonts should be a tad larger, sentences and paragraphs short, sharp and to the point. You have to connect.

Long unbroken blocks of rambling copy are unattractive and will not engage the reader.

And space should be used sensibly, because reading on the web can be difficult.

Use bold text to help make your copy more scannable, but use it judiciously. If you make everything bold, it defeats the purpose.

In my experience, emboldened text tends to work better than italicised text when you need emphasis on web pages.

2. Reading habits are a little different on the web. Make sure you cater for this.

The visitor wants information. Make it easy for them to get it.

Computer screens just don't make comfortable reading platforms. So, concentrate on making it easy for people to scan pages. Break copy up with subheads and headers and well-considered spacing.

Most people just scan, initially. They don't read left to right. They dart all over the place, looking for clues to content.

Make it easy for them to find it – and then deliver what they are looking for, in the clearest way possible. Use punctuation *effectively*.

3. Long copy or short copy? It's not long or short. It's interesting or uninteresting.

Because the problems of reading from a computer screen are well known, far too many companies fall into the trap of skimming on content.

In a lot of cases, this can be a fatal mistake.

When long copy is required, don't be frightened of it. To sell your product or service, use as much copy as is necessary. Remember, the longer they keep reading, the more chance you have of them buying from you.

Keep them reading by making the content 'flow'. You can help this also, by using link words and phrases at the start of new paragraphs, such as "What's more", 'Better still', 'And' and 'But', which link the paragraphs seamlessly, keeping the copy flowing - and the reader reading.

Your prospect needs as much detailed information as possible to provide the reassurance that they are making the right decision. If they are interested in what you have to offer, they will stay as long as it takes, to get what they are looking for.

4. Restrict your use of reversed-out copy

This is one of the most worrying trends. It's everywhere.

Creatives don't seem to know that reversed-out copy reduces readership, by as much as 60%. So, why would you do it?

I see so many websites these days, with copy set over a coloured background (black is very popular). It is daunting to read in print media and even more so on the screen.

Most people won't bother. So your important sales message will not be read.

Be warned.

5. The importance of AIDCA

As with any sales opportunity, you have to *structure* your message delivery. Just like the successful salesmen used to do, way back when.

The copy element of your website is where the real action is. Text attracts more attention than graphics.

This is where you hold the attention of your audience, create interest, generate desire, tell them why they should buy from you and then give them clear and easy instructions on how to do exactly that.

AIDCA. Attention, Interest, Desire, Conviction and Action. Exactly the same sequence as in a DM letter, email or ad.

A sequence that will never change, until the world stops turning.

6. Be specific and be believable

Today, people are sceptical. They don't believe anything anymore.

If your offer is so good, it appears a bit dubious - and your copy, at any time, gives any cause for doubt, then the visitor will stop reading and leave.

The same thing happens in any selling copy.

So, it's important that your copy has the *ring of truth*. This is achieved by your copywriter understanding words and choosing the correct ones at the right time.

Words that are descriptive and positive.

So, there you are. Proof if any was needed, that copywriting techniques that sell offline, will sell online too.

But, before I conclude, an article about writing for websites wouldn't be complete without mentioning the dreaded SEO, because this subject has reached almost mystical status in certain circles.

To give it its full name, **search engine optimisation** is the technique of writing copy text on a web page in such a way that it reads well for the spiders.

This can result in the site enjoying a higher ranking in the search engines for the targeted search terms.

SEO is 'manufactured' copy aimed to attract a particular audience. But, it's not those potential prospects, customers or clients at all, staggeringly – but the spiders.

These are those shadowy figures that get turned on to your particular subject or discipline, by reading copy that has the right number of relevant phrases and words in any block of copy, that they find important.

The spiders review web pages and if they like what they see, they rate the page highly, which in turn drives traffic to the site. I think we can all understand the logic there.

But there's a BIG problem with this. And it's as big as it gets...

Companies are now placing more importance on this 'manufactured' copy, than on the 'real' copy that does the selling. I have seen so many sites recently, where copy is clearly written for the spiders - not for human beings.

So, when real people visit the site, they are confronted with copy that's so unattractive and unappealing, so lacking in the killer elements, it fails to connect.

So, the visitor leaves and will never return. It's barmy...

The spiders love you. But real people don't. It's total lunacy in my book.

A knowledgeable copywriter will give you copy that sells to real people, but also will embrace the benefits of SEO for the spiders.

It's not difficult. It's just an approach.

But, emotional selling copy to humans, comes first. Manufactured copy for spiders comes second.

Every time.

Let me tell you something. Most web copy that I have seen in the last few years, clearly written by an "SEO professional", is appalling. It doesn't sell anywhere near hard enough. But how can it?

It's manufactured.

Wooden.

Hopeless.

I've been in DM for over 31 years. I've been writing cutting-edge copy for the best part of that time. I know what is needed *technically* and *emotionally* in copy terms, to get a prospect hooked - in any medium.

Every word is a *weapon* to me, when I'm writing selling copy. Every comma, dash and dot is a calculated decision. I write that way for a reason.

Because it *delivers*.

It connects and engages. It convinces. It produces interest, response and orders.

It SELLS.

I would never ALLOW my finely crafted copy to be diluted and defaced by a SEO copywriter who is only interested in spiders.

Who the bloody hell are they anyway? Spiders do not place business.

People do.

And real people do not get turned on by manufactured copy.

And they never will.

If you want to sell more through your website, your copy HAS to communicate *effectively*. It HAS to SELL...

Nothing is more important. *Nothing...*

Don't forget. Copywriting techniques that sell off-line, will sell on-line too...

...believe it, because it's true...

Keep the faith



ABOUT YOUR AUTHOR

Andy Owen is MD of **Andy Owen Copy & Creative Ltd**, one of the most respected and experienced International direct marketing consultancies, specialising in all aspects of creative, copy and strategy for direct and digital marketing.

Andy has been writing copy for over 31 years. He writes traditional and digital marketing campaigns, including direct mail, sales letters, emails, SMS's, PPC ads, media ads, websites, landing pages, brochures, radio scripts and much, much more.

He works with top clients in three continents and was inducted into the **Direct Marketing Hall of Fame** in February 2015, one of only two individuals in Europe with that honour.

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Andy runs **in-house copywriting training** for companies of all types and also presents direct marketing Masterclasses, Workshops and Seminars all over the world. (Including Direct Mail.)

If you would like further information on these, or indeed any aspect of copywriting and creative for direct marketing, please contact Andy personally at andyowen@aol.com

All Andy's **previous Copycat articles** are available to download and enjoy.

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