

A Beginners Guide To Website Copywriting

“How to Create Website Content”

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1 Web Page Copywriting Guide

Primary reason for publishing a particular page

It is most important to clearly state (even if only to yourself!) the reason why a particular web page is required for your website (and... saying it will make the author feel good is NOT a valid reason ;-). To survive this simple validation test, your new page must provide a direct benefit to your target audience, ie. Providing valuable information, or communicating a key message from your organisation.

Define your target market

While your overall market may be the community-at-large, hence making for a 'fuzzy' focus, the individual pages of most websites should be more sharply focussed. If your services and/or products are targeted towards senior citizens, try to use similar words and phrasing to that which this group use when conversing to each other. Similarly, if promoting to 10 – 20yo online gamers, use language they are familiar with. Try to create a firm image of the 'ideal person' in your head for whatever page you are creating, then talk to them in a direct conversational manner.

Web page format

Ideally you should have all your critical (read 'attention-grabbing') information visible on the screen without the viewer needing to scroll further down the page.

1. Page headline (3 – 7 words, but MUST fit on one line in large, bold font).
2. This can be followed by an optional page sub-heading, in smaller font size preferably a single line, however no more than two lines.
3. Introductory sentence, ideally of 20 – 30 words (MUST have impact on viewer)
4. Clearly express your page's main message and customer(s) benefits with 1 – 5 bullet points (3 – 7 words if possible, but MUST fit on a single line).
5. Follow the bullet points with several paragraphs providing greater detail of your page's particular customer benefit or service (preferably 250 – 750 words).

A typical web page layout

Main Page Heading Goes Here (start with primary keyword phrase)

An optional page sub-heading can go in this space ... and must generate INTEREST (start with primary keyword phrase, 10 – 20 words max.)

Introductory sentence generating a higher level of interest plus 'desire' (include primary keyword phrase, 20 – 30 words, 2 – 3 lines max.)

- **Bullet point 1** (but no more than 5 points)
- **Bullet point 2**
- **Bullet point 3**

(*a 'call-to-action' can be included as a bullet point eg. "click here to register", "click here to order...", etc.)

This is where a more detailed description of the page's key benefits or services should be written. Generally 2 – 5 paragraphs with 250 to 500 words in total (*make sure you have a 'call-to-action' at the bottom of each page... even if it is only an invitation to proceed to more information... do not create more than 750 words per page unless there is a strong reason to do so).

1.1 Understanding ‘AIDAS’

The acronym ‘AIDAS’ stands for:

- **Attention**
- **Interest**
- **Desire**
- **Action**
- **Satisfaction**

This is the format used in most successful marketing pieces created over the past 80 years and builds on the work of advertising pioneer Claude Hopkins (1866 – 1936).

Attention

The opening page headline must ‘grab’ your target audience, so think carefully about who you want to visit the page in question and try to view your heading from their point of view instead of your own. eg. The old “How To Win Friends And Influence People” is a classic attention-getting headline (*it also helped sell 15 million copies of the book!).

Interest

Once you have grabbed your prospect’s attention, your page has 1 – 2 seconds to generate ‘interest’ or your prospect is GONE. Remember there are over 30 billion web pages out there in Cyberspace today... so make sure you create an interest-generating introduction prior to listing your most critical customer benefits in the following bullet points.

Desire

Use your bullet points to build on the interest you have generated to create ‘desire’ in the mind of your prospect. This ‘desire’ can be simply to gain further information on your topic... it does not have to be the desire to have a physical product. It could be the ‘desire’ to fill out a web page form to subscribe to your department’s newsletter, or... the ‘desire’ to join a group you are forming, etc.

Action

If you have paid attention to the Action, Interest, Desire part of the above AIDAS formula, you should be able to get your prospect to follow your call to action. eg. “Click here to join our Mailing List”, or “Enroll in our group today”, etc.

NB: There is also great value in creating a sense of urgency at this point. This can be done by adding value, eg. “Enroll this week and receive a FREE “, or “A 10% discount applies to all bookings made before.....”, etc.

Satisfaction

This is the final reward for both you and your prospect who has now become one of your ‘customers’. It is critical to ensure that your department delivers promptly on any action taken by your customer, whether it is simply mailing out a CD, or sending a courtesy confirmation email stating their order has been received, etc. This is a great chance to build long-term relationships with your website’s visitors, but unfortunately is the area where most organisations ‘drop-the-ball’.

1.2 Useful ‘Hot Words’ That May Help

List of ‘Hot Words’ and Phrases

To make things easy for you, here is a list of the most motivating words and phrases used in copywriting today.

HOT motivating words (*strongest words in **bold** font)

Absolutely, **amazing**, approved, attractive, **authentic**, bargain, better, big, **breakthrough**, cash, colossal, complete, **confidential**, crammed, delivered, direct, discount, **discover**, discovery, easy, **enjoy**, excellent, **exciting**, **exclusive**, expert, famous, fascinating, fortune, **free**, genuine, gift, gigantic, greatest, **guaranteed**, helpful, huge, immediately, improved, incredible, informative, instructional, interesting, largest, latest, limited, **love**, lowest, **magic**, miracle, **money**, new, noted, odd, outstanding, personalized, popular, power, powerful, practical, private, professional, profit, profitable, **proven**, quality, **rare**, reduced, refundable, remarkable, reliable, results, revealed, revolutionary, scarce, scientific, **secrets**, security, select, sensational, simplified, sizable, special, **startling**, strange, strong, sturdy, **successful**, superior, **surprise**, terrific, tested, tremendous, ultimate, unconditional, **unique**, unlimited, useful, **valuable**, wealth, **you**.

NB: 'You' is the all time, most important word you can ever use in copywriting.

Make sure you use the word '**you**' at least 5 times more than you use the word '**I**'. Remember, your prospects are reading your ad with the constant desire to know 'What's in it for me?'

HOT motivating phrases

Act now!..... Be one of the first 100 people to..... Free details..... Free list..... Free catalog..... Free directory..... Free course..... Free gift with purchase..... Free samples..... Extra bonus..... Get started now..... Get your copy today..... Get yours at wholesale prices..... Limited time offer..... No obligation..... Order direct from the manufacturer..... Satisfaction guaranteed or your money back..... Send today.

General hints on writing style

1. Use simple words wherever possible. Unless you are targeting PhDs, try to use words of 2 – 3 syllables. Even though your target market may be exclusively adults... you will be more successful if your article can be read and easily understood by a 10 year old.
2. Talk directly to your prospect just the same as you would if he/she was standing in front of you.
3. Use modern language, eg. “I’ve” instead of “I have”, “You’ll” instead of “You will”, “We’re” instead of “We are”, etc. etc. Only resort to the more formal version for impact when stressing a point.
4. Break the formal rules of grammar anytime you feel there is sufficient reason for doing so (done mostly in headlines and bullet point phrases).
5. Every web page should have a ‘call-to-action’ in one, or more places. Even if it is only an invitation to read the next web page, it is much more successful to use phrases like, “Discover The Secret to our Group’s Success” rather than “Next page”, or “Click here for more info”. This becomes much more important when you are trying to persuade your prospect to make an actual ‘buying decision’

1.3 A “Dummies Guide To Search Engine Optimisation”

Which search engines generate the traffic?

90% of the Internet’s search engine traffic is generated by Google - www.google.com, Yahoo – www.yahoo.com and MSN – www.msn.com

Keyword research

Give careful thought to the primary keyword phrase for each page you create, and the following *Overture service can help with this task. You can gain reliable information on the popularity of keyword phrases by using the *Overture keyword suggestion tool at the following website address (*now taken from searches on Yahoo): <http://inventory.overture.com/d/searchinventory/suggestion/>

Once on the above web page, simply type your search word, or phrase into the search field to find the number of searches performed for that phrase. The results are for a 30 day period, generally 2 months prior to the current date. It will also return the number of searches done for related keywords and this can often provide you with other keyword phrases to consider for inclusion in the general text on the page.

Text is ‘Terrific’!

Search engines index and rank the visible text on a web page, they cannot see photographs and other graphics. If you want search engines to find the page you are about to create, include your keyword phrase several times in the page’s text.

NB: However it is most important that you do not neglect your human readers in your quest for that magic “Top 10” search engine ranking. Make sure you stick to the rules of AIDAS we have already explained so that you create *attention*, generate *interest*, foster *desire* and hopefully you’ll get the *action* you are seeking from your viewer(s).

The critical things are:

- focus on one keyword phrase per page for most impact
- begin your page headline with the keyword phrase
- try to include the keyword phrase in your sub-heading
- begin the first paragraph with the keyword phrase
- ensure that it is used 3 – 7 times in the remainder of the body text
(*do not over-use your keyword phrase in the body text or you run the risk of being penalised by the search engines for ‘spamming’)

No ‘Instant Gratification’

It can take anywhere from 6 weeks, to 6 months to achieve any sort of ranking by the major search engines. Google was the first to introduce a mandatory ‘waiting period’ of up to 6 months before it will give high rankings to new websites. Now our research indicates that Yahoo, MSN and Ask Jeeves are also ‘side-lining’ new websites for varying periods of time.

“Content is King”

While there are a number of things we Internet gurus can do to help a website’s rankings, the most valuable asset is creating keyword-rich content for each and every page on your website. And that is where you, the copywriter, can help greatly, by ensuring your keywords are liberally sprinkled throughout each page you create text for.