

Chris's Copywriting Checklist

There's a well known expression that "there is nothing new under the sun" and it describes perfectly how many of the things that we see and desire are clever re-interpretations 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 simple checklist that you can use for almost any item of online or offline marketing communications - I use it as a guide when reviewing client's existing marketing material – the secret is to be really honest!

Initial impact

Nothing works in isolation. The overall impact of any marketing material is critical so the design, feel, choice of media, media delivery, timing, relevance, copy, immediate message and many others factors are all fundamental and none can be considered out of context. 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 is not, then identify what's wrong and if you can't work out what's wrong, get some advice or do some research and find something that's better.

Headlines

As a general rule, if you have your company name as the headline you are wasting your money and might as well give up. Yes it might make you feel good, but no-one cares. Why not at least highlight a benefit or feature of your product or service that has a value. The same applies to headlines within the item you are reviewing; use headlines to focus attention on the core messages you wish to communicate – they are the signposts 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 the few words that communicate what makes your product or service valuable. Sadly in my experience many products and services on offer 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 be in a position to have something of value to market and believe in.

What do you want to happen?

No really, what do you want the person to do when they interact with your marketing material? 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 enquiries with the right copy so that those enquiries 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.

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 easier to grasp.

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 more than lack of consistency. Now fire up the web and take a look at your online presence and review what you have on the desk. 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 having 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, superficial, non-permanent and lack credibility. Next, if appropriate, offer free quotations and or guarantees and add some testimonials that have real names and company details. Free samples, or 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 worthwhile that will be a real asset to your business.

If you need any help with the above, or would like a FREE review of your current marketing material then give me a call. Chris Crossland on 07828 019308 or email chris@simplygreatcopy.com