

HOW TO WRITE PERSUASIVE COPY: 9 SECRETS THAT ADD POWER TO YOUR WRITING

by Trey Ryder

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Nearly everything you do involves writing. And, not surprisingly, marketing writing is different from legal writing. Here are nine rules for writing powerful, persuasive words that motivate people to action:

SECRET #1: Write to one person, you. Compare these three statements: (1) How to improve marketing results. (2) How lawyers can improve their marketing results. (3) How you can improve your marketing results.

In sentence 3, when I use “you,” you immediately see that you are the focus of my writing. When you use “you,” your prospect sees immediately that he is the focus.

In school, we were taught to write in third person, but in marketing, we write in second person, always addressing “you” the reader.

SECRET #2: Translate features into benefits. A feature is a fact about you or your firm. A benefit is what your client gains when he takes advantage of the feature. You connect the feature and the benefit with the words “this means.”

For example: We have six lawyers in our firm. (What’s the benefit to your client?) This means... we can satisfy all your legal needs in one firm without having to send you to another law firm. Or... this means if your primary attorney is out of the office, another lawyer is always here to help you. Or... (whatever it means to your clients).

List every competitive advantage and every feature you offer clients. Then translate those features into benefits your clients enjoy from working with you. Every time you write something in a marketing document, state and restate the benefits you offer your clients.

When you translate features to benefits, you uncover the reasons people hire your services. Spell out your benefits in terms of what your prospects want, do, feel and like. How your service works to your prospect’s advantage.

Remember, your prospect won’t hire your services until he knows how he will benefit. So it’s a good idea to list the features, then explain how each feature translates into benefits your prospect wants.

SECRET #3: Write with enthusiasm. Keep your reader awake with words that move. High-impact words -- not dull, routine ones. Active verbs, not passive verbs. Change: “If you

are interested in hiring me” (passive) -- to “If you want to hire me” (active). Change: “The lawsuit will be filed today” (passive) -- to “I will file your lawsuit today” (active). Choose active voice to keep your reader alert and vigorously involved with your message.

SECRET #4: Choose short, simple words. Write your marketing documents at the sixth grade level because short words pack a powerful punch. Even the best-educated people don’t resent simple words. But simple words are the only words many people understand. Even if you have to substitute three or four short words for one long word, you’re usually wise to do so.

Consider any word over two syllables a bad word. Try to find a shorter version of it -- either one or two short words. But make sure the short word or phrase is as meaningful as the long one it replaces. For example, change “information” to “news” or “facts”. Replace “indicate” with “show”. Convert “utilize” to “use”. What you say is more important than how you say it. You don’t need fancy language to convey a straightforward message. Choose short, simple words.

SECRET #5: Keep sentences short. Short sentences are easier to read and understand than long sentences. When you’re writing to an upscale audience, keep your sentences between 15 and 20 words. For average readers, shorten your sentences to 10 to 15 words.

Nothing turns people off faster than long, awkward sentences. When you find a long sentence, try to break it into two or three shorter ones -- because the first time your prospect doesn’t understand what you’re saying, he’s apt to mumble, “Well, I’ll read this later.” And you know what that means.

Another word of caution: Be careful not to end up with only short sentences. This makes your copy seem unnatural. The number of words per sentence is an average. Some sentences will be longer, some will be shorter.

SECRET #6: Keep paragraphs short. Try to keep them no longer than five lines of type. Not five sentences, but five lines. No reader likes to pick up a letter or other document and see a huge block of print staring him in the face. If a paragraph is longer than five lines, try to break it into two shorter paragraphs. Also, vary your paragraph length. Follow a two- or three-line paragraph with a four- or five-line paragraph, and so on.

SECRET #7: Don’t skimp on facts. If you want your prospect to hire you, you need to answer every question he might ask. This means you’ll be lengthy, but don’t worry. Long copy works. Not because it’s long, but because it’s complete. If you reach an interested prospect, chances are good that he’ll read every word. You can’t expect your prospect to hire you if he doesn’t have the information he needs to make a decision. So don’t skimp on facts.

SECRET #8: Treat your reader with respect. When addressing your prospects, always talk up, not down. When flattered, people usually rise to the occasion. But when insulted, they quit reading and you’re history. Treat your prospect as if he drives a Rolls Royce and attends the opera.

SECRET #9: Don’t waste words. Examine each word in your document. Is it necessary? Does it help get your prospect to respond now? If it doesn’t help, it hurts -- because it distracts your prospect from the important parts of your message.

No, that doesn't mean you should write in chopped sentences or stingy phrases. Instead, start by writing twice as many words as you need. Then edit your copy down to the bare bones. Cut it 'til it bleeds. If you don't need a word, get rid of it. Lean writing looks better, reads better, and it's easier to understand. It moves your prospect to action. So don't waste words.

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Trey Ryder specializes in Education-Based Marketing for lawyers. He offers three free articles by e-mail: 13 Marketing Misconceptions That Cost Lawyers a Fortune, 11 Brochure Mistakes Lawyers Make and Marketing Moves Most Lawyers Miss. To receive these articles, send your name and e-mail address to trey@tretryder.com and ask for his free articles.