

Your Web Site Copy

When it comes to filling our web sites with words, we tend to lean towards what I like to call the "cocktail party approach to web site copy." What do I mean by this? Well, let's pretend you're at a cocktail party, you're huddled with a group of friends gabbing about everything under the sun, around you hundreds of other conversations are mingling with your own making the voices sound like a "hum" to anyone just observing this party. That's what it's like to a web site visitor when you're cramming a whole bunch of cocktail party copy onto your home page. It's confusing and it's white noise and chances are good that it will result in a "click" signaling that the party's over and your visitor is long gone.

Two of my personal pet peeves are 1) people who want to give me every piece of instruction under the sun on their site. I don't care if I'm developing cold-fusion. If you give me more than 300 words of directives I'm outta there. And 2) don't yell at me. That's my mother's job. When you use lots of CAPS OR EXCLAMATION POINTS (!!!) I feel like you're yelling at me and frankly, lots of exclamation points scare me. I mean let's be honest, no one can be that excited about anything. When I spoke to AME's Internet expert, Nancy Hendrickson (she's also one of the top copywriters in the country), she told me about the elements of good copy. "The Internet has made 'brochure-style' writing obsolete," Hendrickson told me. "Studies have clearly shown that people do not read web sites - they skim them. That means your copy must be written to catch the eye - and keep the visitor on your site. How do you write scannable web site copy? By incorporating:

- lots of white space
- bullet points
- highlighted and bolded words
- images

In addition, your copy needs to use simple words, short sentences, and include the keywords your site visitor probably used to find your site in a search engine.

Writing Great Web Site Sales Copy

When it comes to the Net, "maybe's" rule. Unlike storefront businesses you don't have to get a "yes" or "no" answer, you can get a maybe and still make the sale. "Maybe I'll sign up for the newsletter now and decide if I want the book later" or "Maybe I'll just get one of the reports and come back later for the book." On the Net you may be dealing with more maybe's than you are yes's or no's, so your site (and your web copy) should reflect this sales strategy. We'll go more into depth about selling on the Net in another issue, but for now start thinking about everything you could sell (besides your book) that will help address the "maybe" visitors out there. Before you put pen to paper to write your sales copy, be clear about your goals. While you may be building the site to sell your book, as you start to look at the broader reach of your message, your goals might change.

Regardless of these goals, one of the best things you can do for your site is add a means to capture a name and email address so you can market to your visitors again and again and again. At AME, our newsletter (the one you're reading) goes out bi-weekly. While the newsletter may require a lot of time to write and create, it's worth its weight in gold because it allows us to stay on the radar screen of our customers and web visitors. "Marketing wisdom," offers Hendrickson, "shows us that your best customer is your current customer. That means if someone is interested enough to visit your site, they're probably interested enough to learn more about your current book and your next book. How do you notify them? By capturing their e-mail address."

When it comes to sales copy, the WIIFM (what's in it for me) is more important than ever. Says Hendrickson: "People want to know what benefit they'll receive from buying your book. Don't be shy - tell them! Will they get an inscribed book plate, will they laugh for 6 hours, will they learn something fascinating, or will they be applauded at Christmas for all their cool book gifts? Although visitors want to know you, the person, sales copy is much more about telling them how their life will be better, safer, happier, funnier once they've bought your book."

Once your sales copy is written, do NOT make your visitor search all over your site in order to buy your book! Put your BUY THE BOOK button in an obvious, easy-to-find space. You may be laughing now, but we've worked with authors who buried the BUY link so deep in the site it was impossible to find! The reality, of course, is that most authors don't really like writing sales copy, and that's okay. However, unless the world is filled with your relatives, you're going to need sales copy to sell your book. So, if you feel you don't have the skill or desire to write good sales copy, hire a professional and let them write the words that will help you strike web site copy gold.

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