

THE TOP TEN MARKETING WRITING MISTAKES

1. Emphasis is ME ME ME (your company) rather than YOU YOU YOU (the customer). It's fine to tell your customers about your company—and in fact, customers WANT a reason to do business with you—but give them a reason to care about your new state-of-the-art manufacturing plant. For example, will they get a better product or service? Lower prices? Faster turn-around?

2. All features, no benefits. Is your gizmo revolutionary? Does it include the latest titanium whatever? Don't let engineers write your copy! Focus on benefits, not features, to help your customers make their purchasing decisions.

3. Copy that fails to answer the question, "What's in it for me?" (Follow up to mistake #2.) When stating the customer benefit, stay away from generalities. Remember those quirky Volkswagen Beetle ads from the 1950s and 60s? My favorite is the "Think small" ad. In it, the copywriters were quite specific regarding the Bug's real benefits: 32 miles to the gallon, never needing anti-freeze, and being able to squeeze into tight parking spaces.

4. Too much jargon, little, if any, "plain English." You know what a "scalable integrated browser-based front office system" is. But do your customers? Take the time to explain technical jargon—or better yet, eliminate it and replace it with words everyone understands. Your customers will thank you.

5. Redundancies. These include the same idea repeated in two or more sentences or the same phrase or word used repeatedly. How to root them out? Read your copy aloud and really THINK about what it is saying, do a word search using your software tools, and have other people edit your work.

6. No call to action. This is the most common mistake in marketing writing. Your collateral should tell your customers what to do next: pick up the phone, log on to your Web site, click through to a free offer, etc.

7. Copy not addressed to the target audience. Before setting out on any marketing communications piece, write down all the characteristics of your audience that you know. Business titles are not enough. Then make sure your copy addresses your audience's issues.

8. Failure to nail down messaging. Vague, meaningless, or hyped up copy is a good indication you haven't nailed down your key messages. Be sure you know what your company is providing and how you want to communicate it BEFORE you start writing.

9. Poor grammar and punctuation. Yes, people do notice these things and yes, they do detract from your message and image.

10. Failure to edit or proofread (follow up to #9). How many people edit or proof your marketing collateral? If it's just you, you're asking for trouble. Recently I received a very expensive three-dimensional mailer from a graphic design company. It is gorgeous and very well done—only it has a typo. They used "its" rather than "it's." A small error, to be sure, but do you really want to spend tens of thousands of dollars for something that isn't perfect—and that reflects poorly on your company?

BONUS: You see it everywhere: "Free gift." Banish this overused and redundant phrase from your copy. Why is it redundant? Because a gift is free.



© Dianna Huff, ABC, 2001.
All rights reserved.

For more information
about my results-oriented B2B marketing writing services, log
on to www.dhcommunications.com or call (603) 382-8093.

Design: Enrico Design (781) 631-2520