



Chapter 1: Getting to grips with copywriting

If 'clarity' is the main goal of corporate communications, then 'consistency' is the next most important aspect of the way brand messages are expressed. If you are the only writer for the brand, then this is not so difficult as you are more likely to be able to maintain a consistent style and tone in all of your briefs. It is not so easy, however, if there are a number of clients and writers involved — which is more often the case.

There are three main devices you can make use of to help ensure everyone understands, and is able to maintain, the brand's language and tone. These are:

- a word bank
- a brand dictionary
- a tone of voice guide

**Exercise: Create a word bank*

The word bank contains examples of suitable words and short phrases which are typically used by your brand. The bank gives a feel of the sort of words which can be used and those which cannot.

Select a brand you feel you understand. It can be a high street retailer, a sports brand, a product brand or a business organization. Under the following headings make a simple list of the sort of words and short phrases you feel are precisely on-brand.

- language for our internal messages
- how we speak to our customers
- writing for our website
- creating content for brochures and catalogues

To take this a step further, create alternatives for some of the main examples, showing how they can be off-brand in different ways. To go the full distance, you can include examples of copy from direct competitors, showing how they express themselves and making it clear how your brand must remain different and unique.

See Copywriting second edition pages 16-21.

**Exercise: Create a brand dictionary*

A brand dictionary defines the terminology which is supposed to be used within the brand. For example: 'Employees', 'staff' or 'workforce' are referred to as 'our people', or we call our retail outlets 'stores' not 'shops'. Your brand dictionary will have a different purpose to your word bank. The word bank demonstrates the words and phrases which in general are on-brand and suitable, whereas the brand dictionary defines the organization's terminology and jargon to ensure consistent use throughout all its communications – vital for building credibility.

Creating a brand dictionary is an ongoing process. The marketing department or agency will update it as required. The content should be based around how the organization communicates with its staff, and the language it uses for marketing and advertising.

Using the same brand you worked with for your word bank, build up a collection of phrases which make it clear what the organization's attitude is all about. Create some examples, such as:

- What are the key calls to action in the marketing and advertising?
- Do they say 'please telephone [number] for an appointment' or 'simply call [number] now, we look forward to telling you more'?
- How do they describe themselves to their customers?
- What terminology does the brand use, for example, for product ranges, processes and procedures?

Create this dictionary as a Word document that you can circulate.

See Copywriting second edition pages 16-21.



**Exercise: Create a tone of voice guide*

A tone of voice guide explains the thinking behind the rules and guidelines of the brand tone of voice. It shows how to follow this approach and still maintain a creative and fresh style of writing.

The guide, which explains how language is used within the brand's communications to customers and employees, is focused on the different audiences the organization is talking to, with the main emphasis on its core customer base.

The tone of voice is centred round the brand's principal values. As a starting point either find out or create the following for your brand:

- three words which describe its essence
- a short strapline summarizing its raison d'être

Then go on to summarize what the brand stands for, and how it makes use of language. Give examples of how language is used in different contexts, for example with customers, with shareholders, with staff, within advertising, etc. Next outline the brand's core values and relate the tone of voice to this focal point. Refer to the word bank and dictionary as important documents for managing the tone of voice.

See Copywriting pages 16-21 and 53-55.



Chapter 2: The art of writing great copy

There is no right or wrong way to take a copywriting brief, but the way you take a brief and process it before you begin writing is the most important element in any copywriting project.

As a first step, you should gather as much information as you can by interrogating the client — or your account manager if he or she has taken the brief — until you fully understand the subject matter and the specific requirements and implications of the brief. The next step is to back this up with some research of your own. Facts and figures can prove very useful when you are immersed in your creative writing and searching for inspiration.

Below is a typical briefing form which outlines the important information you need to record. A blank version of this form is also available as a separate PDF for you to download and use.

See *Copywriting second edition* pages 25-28.

* *Copywriting brief*

| | |
|-------------------|---|
| Date brief taken: | <i>This is more of a reference for future use than anything else.</i> |
|-------------------|---|

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| Job title: | <i>It is essential to label each new brief with a unique title and reference number.</i> |
| Job number: | |

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| Client company: | <i>List the company name in full.</i> |
| Contact name: | <i>Make sure you spell the client's name correctly.</i> |
| Address: | <i>Again, the contact details must be totally accurate.</i> |
| Email: | |
| Tel no. | |
| Account holder: | |
| Copywriter: | |

| | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Overall requirement: | <i>Summarize, in very general terms, what the client is expecting to achieve with the copy, and with the marketing or communications project as a whole.</i> |
| Initial deadline(s): | <i>When do you need to get back to the client, and what are they expecting (such as a quote, some sample copy, a schedule)?</i> |
| Final delivery by: | <i>When is the finished copy needed, including any supporting notes about any intermediate stages.</i> |

| | |
|-------------------------|--|
| Background info: | <i>Write a paragraph or two about the background information you have gleaned about the client, the strategy behind this brief, any similar projects the client has created, and how they performed.</i> |
| Aims and objectives: | <i>Outline the specific objectives of the copy – what is the client wanting to communicate, to which audience, and what response is sought.</i> |
| Budget: | <i>Make a note of the budget or if this is still to be confirmed/discussed.</i> |

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| Our approach: | <i>How are you going to tackle this creative project – are you going to plan it out and draft sample copy for example, or do you need to establish word counts from the typesetters?</i> |
| Their marketing plan: | <i>What is the overall marketing or communications plan this copywriting brief relates to? For example: it could be a three-stage direct marketing campaign, or combine a mailer with an advertisement, supported by a website.</i> |



- Our marketing advice: *What advice do you have from the point of view of the copywriting? What tone of voice is the most appropriate? Should it be long or short copy and is there anything else you should be explaining to the client as part of the response to this brief?*
- Elements in the mix: *What formats are being included? For example: advertising, direct mail, website, brochure, leaflet, company magazine, etc. As this is a core element in the brief, provide as much detail as you can.*
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Profiling the audience and getting to grips with the message

- Target audience:** *What are the rough age, income level, location and overall profile of the people the messages are aimed at?*
- What are they like: *Using your gut instincts, anecdotally describe what the audience's likes and dislikes might be, and the attitude they have to life.*
- Market profile: *Is this a well-established marketplace playing on traditions, or a new one that requires a focus on innovation? Set the context for this new communication.*
- Client's position: *Is the client a leader or a new entrant? Does the client have a strong brand or is it unknown? Give an angle on the way the brand has to be presented.*
- Main competition: *Summarize the client's competitors, explaining how they compare, and where the opportunities for the client are.*
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- Main message:** *What is the overriding and most compelling message that must be communicated?*
- Supporting evidence: *Justify this and support it with facts and figures.*
- Background material: *Collect as much of the client's other communications, and supporting information relating to the subject, as you can.*
- Raw material: *Interview the client and gather as much raw data as possible.*
- Client's creative direction: *What direction, if any, has the client provided?*
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Chapter 3: Writing for brand and marketing

Brand naming is a tough call. Where a lot of the challenges of copywriting require a number of language crafts and creative skills, creating a single name, a word, is anyone's game. Having the eye to know which will work well and which won't, is not as easy as it might seem.

**Exercise: Create a brand for a specialist package holiday*

You are a copywriter in a creative team that includes graphic designers and a creative director. A brief has come in from a client, SuperMed Holidays, who specialize in family breaks in the Mediterranean (sunshine and beaches, 3 star hotels, etc). SuperMed have created a new holiday package especially for scuba-divers. The target audience is qualified BSAC or PADDI divers, who must have their own wetsuit and basic diving equipment (mask, fins, depth gauge).

The features of the package include:

- all diving trips arranged and managed
- choice of 5 quality dive centres throughout the Mediterranean
- 7 days diving, 14 dives in total
- great accommodation and food
- some of the world's best diving

The benefits offered are:

- a complete package, satisfaction guaranteed
- all-inclusive price
- great value for money
- meet other divers and have a great holiday

Your brief is to:

- Create a name for the diving package holiday. You are expected to present 3 or 4 strong ideas, with some explanation of the thinking behind each one.
- Create a compelling strapline for each proposed brand name that explains the benefits and attracts interest from the target audience.

Tips

Consider the following for creating a name:

- Try experimenting with amalgamating industry terms or words.
- Trawl Latin and Greek dictionaries to find interesting words with good connotations.
- Look up relevant words in dictionaries and thesaurus.
- Research and note down the names of competing brands.
- Prioritize your short list so that you have 2 or 3 really 'hot' names.

See *Copywriting second edition* pages 41-42, 57-58



Chapter 4: Writing for advertising and direct marketing

Advertising is a one-way communication that aims to raise awareness of a client's message to a specific audience, and it operates in every medium and in many different forms. Of all these forms, billboard campaigns are one of the most challenging: your message has to be read from a distance, in an instant, and be both compelling and memorable. Many large scale billboard campaigns are about creating awareness and are part of a wider media mix, but others have to pay their way – they have to generate an immediate positive response from their audience, the general public, and they have to work on their own.

**Exercise: Create a billboard campaign*

You are a copywriter in a creative team that includes graphic designers and a creative director. A brief has come in from a client, 5G Phones, a mobile phone company. The client has created a bespoke phone tariff especially for students and they want a high-profile billboard advertising campaign. The deal is available only to registered students and they have to sign-up for an 18 month contract.

The features of the service are:

- a fixed price contract of £25 month
- free internet access
- 100 minutes of calls a month
- unlimited texts to 5 nominated friends
- 100 texts a month allowance to others

The key benefits are:

- low price, fixed cost = easy to budget and control costs
- plenty of calls and texts every month
- unlimited internet access is a huge benefit

Your brief is to:

- Create 2 or 3 campaign concepts to appear on billboards to attract students and get them to sign-up (these concepts must be short, sharp and compelling).
- Produce conceptual headlines and supporting copy which should help to inspire graphic treatments in terms of visual ideas as well.

Tips

Consider the following:

- Who are your target audience and what are they like? Profile your audience.
- What is the core message to be communicated to them? You might focus on a single, overriding benefit.
- Why is this phone package interesting, and what about it is different or unique? Perhaps outline the problem it solves, why it is good value for money, etc.
- Focus on the written elements of the brief.

See *Copywriting* pages 72-81.



Chapter 5: Writing for retailing and products

The challenge in writing for retailing and products is in understanding the type of people you are writing for and what their mindset is — essentially they are looking for something and you are making it easier for them to find it. Good copy is vital — get this right and you'll be boosting the success of the product.

**Exercise: Create a retail promotion*

You are a copywriter in a creative team that includes graphic designers and a creative director. A brief has come in from a client, Evergreen Health and Beauty, a health and beauty retailer that creates and manufactures its own beauty products. To everyone's surprise and the client's delight, Evergreen has created the first ever anti-aging moisturizing cream that has been scientifically proven in clinical trials to reduce wrinkles and counter the signs of aging. The product is called 'Ageless Beauty'. It is going to be a big seller and is in demand. It will be in-store soon and the client needs to promote the product in-store with a merchandizing campaign which will consist of huge posters and free-standing display units.

The product's features are:

- scientifically proven to remove wrinkles (a world first)
- guaranteed to make you look younger
- only available as this patented formula
- exclusive to Evergreen

Your brief is to:

- Create a campaign theme to promote and sell 'Ageless Beauty' to Evergreen's customers (this campaign should raise awareness and build sales, but don't over-hype the product — it will sell itself and doesn't need over-promoting).
- Produce a selection of concept headlines and summary copy for point of sale promotion to appear on posters and merchandizing.

Tips

Consider the following when selecting language, phrases, words and expressions to evoke the essence of the product:

- What is the core idea?
- What is the product's vision?
- What values are associated with this?
- What is its personality like?
- Why should a customer believe this?

See Copywriting second edition pages 119-121.



Chapter 6: Writing for company magazines, newsletters and internal communications

A carefully thought through, well-written and well-designed company magazine is a very powerful brand communications tool that can play a leading role in ensuring that a client's employees and customers think favourably about their organization. As the writer, it is essential that you take the time to understand the context of your story fully, research the background and present your information credibly to an informed audience.

Exercise: Create a new in-house magazine

You are a copywriter in a creative team that includes graphic designers and a creative director. A brief has come in from a client, Independent Healthcare, a private healthcare provider that operates 15 hospitals. It specializes in privately-insured patients and has expertise in paediatrics, cosmetic surgery and orthopaedics. The brief is for a patient magazine which conveys the message that Independent Healthcare is a progressive forward-thinking, trustworthy and dependable company. The target audience is educated, reasonably well-off, of all ages and from all backgrounds.

Your brief is to:

- Create and produce a bi-monthly patient magazine, and specifically to:
 - suggest 3 or 4 masthead names for the magazine
 - create a 16 page editorial plan to incorporate a range of regular items suitable for the target audience
 - suggest the tone of voice of the magazine by creating a series of sample headlines and some introductory copy for articles and news items, which can be incorporated into the pitch visuals
 - Suggest an overall editorial plan for the first six issues of the magazine to show how you will maintain fresh editorial throughout the year.

Tips

Consider the following:

- Keep the intended audience to the forefront of your mind. The reader must be able to identify with the messages and feel that they relate to his or her lifestyle.
- Select the content carefully and shape it with the audience in mind.
- Make sure the tone of voice of the magazine is relevant to the reader – it is a major part of the magazine's style and impact.
- Ensure the magazine achieves the client's objectives.
- Focus on the written elements of the brief.

See Copywriting second edition pages 136-144.



Chapter 7: Writing for catalogues

There are arguments for and against long descriptive product copy in catalogues. There are also debates about the value of having fewer products per page, or including as many as possible, in terms of which creates the best overall sales results.

In terms of the approach to copywriting, one school of thought says that a quality photograph will speak volumes about the product in question, and all the copy needs to do is support the image with a few key points about the product's features. This approach works well if the client wishes to put a lot of items on the page and does not have a lot of room to play with.

At the other extreme, detailed product descriptions, which explain the features and sell the benefits to the reader, are believed to work much better than simple product entries as they present compelling reasons to purchase and work hard to close the sale.

As a copywriter, you may be expected to advise on the best approach to take with catalogue copy. This exercise will help you develop a greater understanding of the challenges of long versus short copy. It will enable you to build your knowledge so that you can provide considered advice.

**Exercise: Converting long copy into short copy*

- Spend a bit of time collecting together some good quality retail catalogues. They can be mail order or showcases of in-store goods. The higher profile they are, the better.
- Study the catalogues and separate them into those that use predominantly long product copy and those that simply include a few features next to the product image.
- From your examples, select the catalogue that uses the longest and most descriptive product entries. Select a double-page spread and study the product entries. Decide which is the most important information on features, as opposed to the elements that are adding personality.
- Re-draft each product entry using the absolute minimum amount of copy. You should include only a few very brief bullet points that are required to give the reader a clear profile of the product (bearing in mind they can study the photograph too).
- Having completed your copywriting, compare your results to the original. What have you lost, what will the reader lack, and what has been gained by paring down the copy?

Tips

Consider the following:

- By having very brief copy entries you are enabling the designer (or trading team) to either feature a much larger photograph or a larger number of images for the product, or to include a greater number of products on the page. Do you think this will help sell more items or do you feel that the original, long copy will generate more sales?
- There is a middle ground. Consider cutting back the long copy and having very brief product entries, but use the additional space this has created to include some supporting information. This could include descriptions of the product range as a whole or of the benefits offered by the features that are being listed. These could be charts, or graphs, or summaries that apply to a number of items and which help avoid repetition in the individual entries.

See *Copywriting second edition* pages 165-169, 177-184.



Chapter 8: Writing for the digital environment

Websites

As the copywriter for a website it is your role to draw in the visitors and to hold their limited attention span for as long as possible. How you do this depends on what your audience expect from the site, and what you feel will work best. You are providing the options to the visitor, and the way you create and present the links between sections and pages in your site is one of the most important elements of your copywriting. Visitors scan for information rather than read the text, and search for the material they want. When they find it, they are likely to want plenty of detail, often in a downloadable format.

**Exercise: Create an online fund-raising campaign*

You are a copywriter in a creative team that includes graphic designers and a creative director. A brief has come in from a client, the Children's Cancer Trust. The Trust is aiming to raise £50,000 in sponsorship by holding a series of 6K fun-runs during the summer months and they want to create an email marketing campaign linked to a dedicated promotional website.

The aim of the Trust is to run 10 events and to attract 500 participants to each event, each of whom is hoped to donate or raise at least £10 for the fund. The target audience is healthy volunteer runners aged 16 to 60 from all backgrounds, and particularly those interested in helping children who have cancer. The overall message is keep fit, have fun and help save children's lives.

Your brief is to:

- Create a campaign theme for the programme (show 2 or 3 ideas).
- Draft a series of 3 emails to be sent in sequence to the target email list.
- Create a copy plan for a 5-page website with headers and sample copy.

Tips

Consider the following for the website plan:

- What are the site's intended role and the overall objective of the project?
- Organize the information into three main layers — introduction/main navigation, directions/generic information and specific material/detailed facts and figures.
- Map out the pages using thumbnail sketches and show the main links.
- Keep content informative, clear and compelling. Use a brief, punchy and energetic style.
- *Also:* Focus on the written elements of the brief — don't worry too much about the visual solutions.

See Copywriting second edition pages 202-207.



Social media

For writers, the digital environment is both a liberating opportunity and an intimidating and overcrowded marketplace. On the one hand, it provides writers with the chance to explore new voices and ways of connecting. On the other hand, you are joining the world's biggest conversation and readers are only a click away from reading something more interesting. However, the old principle of writing still holds true: work out what you want to say, say it, then stop.

**Exercise: Get a blog post featured on Creative Review*

You are a professional writer looking to build your profile in the creative industry. You have a blog with a reasonable following among your peer group, but you would like to reach more people. You decide to publish a blog post and send the link to *Creative Review* with a view to them re-publishing it. The chances are slim — *Creative Review* receives many submissions and suggestions every day. But there are ways to make an impression.

Your brief is to:

- Come up with an original angle on a subject of wide interest.
- Make it relevant to creative professionals in design, advertising, and visual communications.
- Make it personal but broadly consistent with the Creative Review tone and brand.

Tips:

- Look at the world around you. Consider what is topical or current. It could be something in a completely different field to the ones you are usually concerned with – a major news or cultural event.
- Think about ways to draw a link between that event and your interests as a writer. Does the event reveal any interesting parallels? Do you have something different to say?
- Write entertainingly and intelligently. Don't patronize or talk down to your audience. Discover your own voice.
- Avoid industry clichés or commonly covered subjects.

See Copywriting second edition pages 216-220, 226-227

Credit: This exercise has been provided by Nick Asbury.