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13 Copywriting Mistakes to Avoid (or Knowing Why Users Hate You)

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Introduction

Copywriting is an essential and often-frustrating aspect of internet marketing. At first, writing copy for a promotion, for a new sale, or product feature seems like a fairly simple task. In theory, it should be: whatever you write should be concise and persuasive enough to convince a user to follow whatever call to action you provide. However, as everyone in this business knows, getting to that point is easier said than done.

To use a metaphor, copywriting is a double edged sword. Use it well, and it's a tool that wields a lot of power to get the results you're looking for. Use it poorly, and the results could be catastrophic.



If you're reading this e-book, there's a good chance you're unsure of the copywriting on your website because your goals (whatever they may be) may not be converting as you'd like them to. To fix this, you need to know why some copywriting fails miserably. Figure that out, and you'll know why users hate you.

Ok, they don't hate you; they're just not converting.

During my time in this business, I have come across many copywriting mistakes (some of them my own) that caused me to ask myself, "Why did anybody (or at one time, I) think this was a good idea?" This e-book highlights 13 common mistakes that often cause conversions to plummet. Know them and avoid them.

Mistake Number 13

Grammar and Syntax Errors

Let's cover the most obvious one first. If your sentences have obvious mistakes and don't make sense, you come off looking like a complete joke. Thus, nobody will buy from you.

“This new feature has everything your looking for. Form usability to navigation, you’ll wonder how you ever functioned without it.”

Don't write “your” when you mean “you're” and don't write “form” when you mean “from.” Spellcheck isn't going to catch instances like these. If your copy is often riddled with similar mistakes, slow down. And, as a rule of thumb, always have somebody else proof-read your work. Preferably someone at least remotely competent in reading the language you're writing in.

Mistake Number 12

Using the Passive Voice

You may think it sounds clever, but using the passive voice in copywriting overcomplicates things.

“Our services are inclusive of design, development, and coding.”

When it comes to marketing, be as direct as possible. If you go through your writing and notice several statements that could have been said easier, go back and change them. “We provide design services” is much better than “design services are provided by us.”



Mistake Number 11

Writing in Long Paragraphs

Being concise is a major point of copywriting. If you're trying to get someone to make a purchase, fill out a lead form, or download something, trying to persuade them to do so in a long paragraph is one of the worst possible things you can do. Seriously, go to any major news website and you'll notice that their articles are often written in paragraphs that consist of two or three sentences.

Internet users' attention spans are short and giant paragraphs are overwhelming. Space between paragraphs is comforting and short paragraphs give the reader both a sense of accomplishment and awareness.



Mistake Number 10

Numerating Without Making a List

This is one of my biggest pet peeves. If you're going to enumerate anything in an article, make sure there's a damn list to go along with it.

As soon as you write, "Be on the lookout for these 5 things" and then proceed to bulk them in two paragraphs, you piss off a large portion of users. Again, keep it simple. Lists are very effective, so use them to your advantage.

Mistake Number 9

Being Aggressive

There's being excited, and then there's coming across too strong. If I'm reading anything from a company that sounds too forward or produces a guilt trip, I'm going to leave the site. Simply put: don't be a jackass. Your job is to make a user feel welcome, not to try and intimidate them into joining your cause.

“Sign our form to support of our new green initiative and tell others to get with the program. You either want to preserve this planet or you want to destroy it. Which side are you on?”

See what I mean? These types of messages only work in very partisan sectors of marketing in politics. If you're looking to gather support for anything your business is doing, you don't need to be aggressive about it and turn people off.

Mistake Number 8

Not Highlighting the Purpose of Your Article



Let's say you're writing a new landing page for a new product. Ideally, that page should highlight the features of this new product and why it's better than other versions of it. If you write a page that mentions the new product and then goes on to talk about the background of your company, you've missed the point. Pages like this aren't press releases: don't give any reason for users to leave without converting.

Mistake Number 7

Beating Around the Bush

When I was in college, I had a very blunt writing style. Even though it was formal, academic writing, I could finish a complete a thorough argument in 15 pages when it took many of my classmates at least 25. The reason is that I focused on my goal like a laser and concentrated my entire argumentative prowess on that one, specific point. I used background information only when needed and kept everything to the point. I didn't beat around the bush.

This goes along with not highlighting the purpose of your article. The point of any piece of copywriting is to get users to convert on whatever your goal may be. The appropriate call to action needs to be clear. If you're trying to get someone to download a free trial, don't haphazardly mention in the middle of your paragraph that they might want to try it out. Focus all of your writing on that specific goal and make your article as effective as possible.

Mistake Number 6

Un-colloquial Writing

By now, you should be noticing a pattern to all of my explanations. The point I keep stressing is to keep things simple. Copywriting that comes across like a homework assignment is not simple and will cause users to leave your site. With the evolution of social media, internet marketing has become more about having a conversation with users instead of trying to sell them stuff. We live in an industry where “Conversation Marketing” is the rule, not the exception.

Ok yes, that is a shameless plug for my boss’ blog at www.conversationmarketing.com. But there is a ton of great information and commentary there. Go check it out if you’re interested or need to have a quick laugh.



Mistake Number 5

Not Writing to the User

Copywriting should be centered on the fact that the content you're writing exists for the sole purpose of somebody else reading it and, hopefully, getting something out of it. This does not mean you have to write in the 2nd person. It does mean that you have to structure your writing as a pseudo conversation instead of a sales page that may or may not boost your own ego.

From a user's perspective, marketing is all about, "What can you do for me and why should I do business with you?" Never forget that when writing content.

Mistake Number 4

Broad Headlines

If you saw an article with the headline:

“Bigger, Faster, Stronger: Better!”

Would you know what it’s about just by looking at it? I know I wouldn’t. Being clever with headlines is fine, but each headline should give any user a clear idea of what they’re reading.

Let’s say that previous example was the headline for a new pickup truck page on an automobile website. If we put some context into the headline, it will give a notion that is much clearer:

“New 2011 Model Pickup Truck is Bigger, Faster, and Stronger.”



Mistake Number 3

Stretching the Truth

Don't try and pull a fast one over potential customers. You can be fancy, you can be unique, but if you know what's good for you, you will not make a false claim or lie by omission. Be upfront and don't be deceitful. If you do stretch the truth, not only will your conversion fallout rate go up, but you run the risk of receiving scathing reviews by angry users.



Mistake Number 2

Forgetting to Include SEO Keywords

This is a little more technical, but I'll keep it short and simple. In the world of SEO, niche keywords are essential and contribute to your site's ranking for specific terms. Let's say you own a housing inspection business in Chicago and you're writing a new blog post for your site. The purpose of the post should be, in some fashion, to highlight the term "Chicago housing inspector." It would behoove you not to forget to include the term you're attempting to rank for.

Mistake Number 1

Forgetting a Call to Action

This is the cardinal sin of internet marketing copywriting. Whatever you do, do not forget to give a clear call to action. If a user reads your content and is left asking, “What’s the point?” Then you have failed miserably. You need to include the call to action in your content no matter how simple or self-explanatory you think it might be. This is perhaps the most vital point so allow me to re-emphasize:

Always include a call to action in your content.

Conclusion

Avoid these 13 copywriting mistakes and users will like you more. I promise. Your conversion rate will go up and you will be happy.

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