

By Pat Friesen



Clue In Your Copywriter

What all copywriters want to know that only you can tell them

Most of you reading this column probably aren't copywriters. It's more likely you are business owners, product managers or marketing/advertising directors.

You are the people who provide direction and input to writers who have the important assignment of crafting messages that generate response—whether it's a click, call or car trip to a store or event. Most likely, you are also part of the approval process.

So even though you are not a writer, you play a key role in the success or failure of the copy and content copywriters develop because of one or all of the following:

- You know the product inside and out—its strengths, weaknesses and unique benefits.
- You understand the major motivators and buying objections that influence

buyers and nonbuyers. You know the competition, its strengths and vulnerabilities.

- You have access to customer complaints, testimonials and much more.
- You have insights, ideas and detailed information your copywriter wants and needs to craft a compelling sales message.

What follows is a copy checklist designed to help you give direction and input to your writers. I created it for a new client who wanted to make sure he gave me all the background information I needed. While every project may not require everything outlined, this serves as a good guide.

✓ **What is your objective?** Do you want to beat the control by X percent? Generate one-step sales or qualified leads? Strengthen relationships? Introduce a new product? Increase average order size? Initiate Web site involvement? Test media, offers or other direct marketing elements? Transform a one-time trier into a second-time buyer? Generate referrals or measurable forward-to-a-friend activity? Your writer needs to understand what you want to achieve and how success will be measured.

✓ **What is the brand personality?** Is the brand upbeat and innovative or classic and conservative? Does the

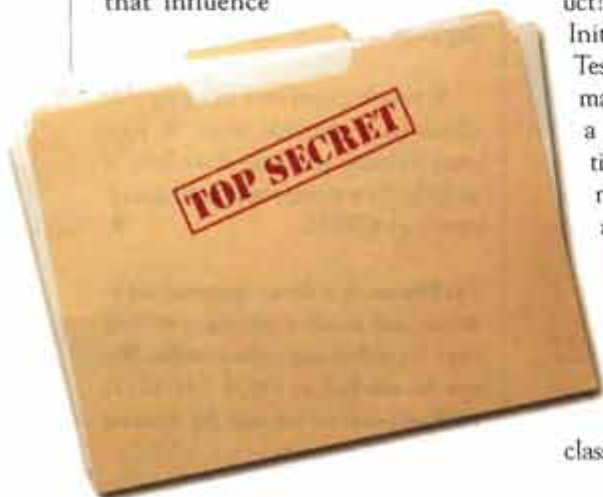
brand have a spokesperson? Is there an established copy voice, tone and vocabulary? Provide examples so these can be sustained.

✓ **Who is the audience?** Is the message directed to a customer or prospect? Multibuyer or first-time trier? Decision maker or decision influencer? What is the average age, household income, educational background of the targeted reader? What is the comfort level with the media selected to deliver the message (i.e., e-mail, postal mail, TV, text messaging, etc.)? The customer/prospect profile you provide helps your writer envision the individual person to whom he or she is writing instead of a sea of nameless, faceless people.

✓ **What is the product/service?** Provide features and corresponding benefits. Identify the top three features/benefits of interest to the targeted audience. What are the truly unique features/benefits? Price? Ordering specifications (size, color, etc.)? Is it new? Improved? A best-seller? Back by popular demand? Also provide competitive advantages and disadvantages.

✓ **What is the offer?** Because the offer is what generates response, make sure to provide your writer with all elements of your offer and why they are included (i.e., discounts, deadlines, guarantees, premiums, other incentives, delivery options,

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payment options, etc.). Remember your offer is more than just a product or service, discount, or free shipping; it's a package of elements bundled together to address key buying objections and push fence-sitters over the edge of indecision.

✓ **What are the top three buying objections?** Provide prioritized information about why people don't buy your product or service. Your writer needs to address these objections—either directly or indirectly.

✓ **What is the call to action?** Do you want people to respond by phone, mail, e-mail, online ordering, clickthrough to a Web site, in-store or at an event? Is a unique landing page required? If the objective is generating leads, provide a sample of the fulfillment package, and/or tell the writer what will happen after a prospect raises his or her hand as a qualified lead.

✓ **What is the format?** For e-mail, is it text or HTML? Does it link to an existing Web page, or is a new landing page required? For direct mail, is it a postcard, solo package, self-mailer, box, tube or some other format? For space advertising, is it a full- or half-page ad? Back page, back cover, ROP? All of these details provide your writer with additional ammunition for crafting a control-beating message.

✓ **What media is being used?** Direct mail lists, e-mail lists, TV, radio, space advertising, etc. Tip: If you're testing e-mail vs. postal mail, be careful about directly picking up traditional letter copy and testing it in e-mail. While I've seen this work, it's rare.

✓ **What is the test plan?** Are you testing copy? Creative? Formats? Lists? List segments? Offers? Timing? Other direct marketing elements?

✓ **Will the copy be translated into**

languages other than English? While this may not directly affect the copy your writer develops, it may influence the overall creative approach.

✓ **What other copy resources are available to the writer?** Interviews with customers? Sales people? Customer service staff? Product managers? Product developers? (Tip: One of the most helpful copy resources made available to me in my writing career was a candy company's food chemist who shared valuable details about the quality of the ingredients. He shared information no one else knew or thought to mention. Customers also have a way of revealing benefits often overlooked by or unknown to marketing staff.)

✓ **Provide a product sample.** Writers like to try what they are writing about because it provides firsthand experience with product benefits. For example, when I was writing a catalog for the gourmet chocolate company mentioned above, I was delighted to sample just about every type of its chocolate so I could taste the difference. However, I did not ask for product samples when writing lead generation copy for hog sperm used in the artificial insemination of pigs.

✓ **Offer a sample of the control.** While some writers prefer not to see the control e-mail, mailing package or space ad they are trying to beat, I do. At least offer it to your writer.

✓ **Provide Web links, when appropriate.** Provide specific links you want included in direct mail, space ad, e-mail, e-newsletter, landing page and Web site copy.

If you're interested in using this checklist to provide input to your own writers, you can download it at <http://www.targetmarketingmag.com/r?s=402858>. ■

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