



How to write great copy – questions and tips from an expert

By George Hulbert

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So, you've just shelled out some cash to pay for some space on the pages of this illustrious publication to show that your latest service/bit of kit/recruit/project is worth tuning into, and they've offered you space for 'advertorial'. Great! Now, what are you going to do with the opportunity?

Tempting as it might be to cut and paste vast chunks of your marketing brochure and drop them onto the page, please don't. Stop. Back away from that idea. Why? Because your intended customers would like you to tell them a story. If you tell, rather than sell, you stand a much greater chance of engaging your reader, and thus of achieving your objective.

But how? If you follow these simple guidelines, you'll write advertorial that people will want to read.

"Think past-present-future: what got us to this point? What does the current situation look like? What factors lie behind it? And what's coming next?"

BEFORE YOU START YOUR COMPUTER ...

First, speak to the publication's editor to check what is required and when. Then, ask yourself ten questions:

1. Who are you trying to reach with this information?
2. What do they really need to know from you?
3. What's the focus of your story – and why is it relevant to the readers of this magazine? There's no point in writing about your spectacular new bulldozer if you're writing an article for NZ Pig Hunter magazine, for example ...
4. How is your thing going to change (or is already changing) your client's world?
5. What's not important to this story?
6. What do you want the reader to do when they read it?
7. Who from your company is going to be quoted? Quotes are always good for adding human flavour and providing context.
8. What sort of stories, evidence, images and quotes can you use to illustrate your points?
9. Have you got a story about how your thing is achieving something specific? Achievement is a powerful tool, particularly if your clients are prepared to say something useful about how you changed their world forever.
10. Critically: when is the deadline, how many words are you allowed, and do you have any good images?

WHEN YOU ARE WRITING THE WORDS ...

Now for the tips:

1. Write it in Word or a similar recognised word-processing programme. Please don't send copy as a pdf or (even) in Excel.
2. Start with the most important thing you want the reader to know: what's the news? A good rule of thumb is to cover



Struggling to tell your story? Need help to paint the picture of your products and services? Follow these useful tips from an expert

the five W's: who, what, when, where, why? 'A new service/widget/machine from ABC Ltd is now achieving amazing results for companies all over New Zealand' for example. Coming up with a short headline is often the best way to focus the story.

3. Write it in the third person (unlike this article): 'he, she, it, they' are always better than 'I' or 'you'.
4. Think past-present-future: 'what got us to this point, what does the current situation look like, what factors lie behind it, and what's coming next?' What are the challenges you're solving, for whom, and why?
5. Back your key points up with some useful detail: 'Because the machine operates to a tolerance of 0.23 microns, the requirements of the client were met and exceeded.'
6. Don't go overboard with technical detail – avoid giving product spec lists. Save that for when people call you for more detail about the machine they saw in the magazine. The point of the article is to generate awareness – you only need to show people enough so that their interest leads to a phone call, not to give them 'War and Peace'.
7. Go and have a cup of coffee and stretch your legs. Smell the

happy air of life.

8. Come back and re-read the article. This time, ask yourself: if I was from the company I want to read this, is it useful and interesting? Then save the original draft, create a new one and chop out what's not useful. Do you really need those two paragraphs about oil pressures?
9. Get someone you trust to read it – and ask them: does it make sense, are there any typos, and what is the number one thing they took from it?
10. Check it again – and then send it in, ahead of deadline if possible.

A FINAL WORD ABOUT IMAGES

When it comes to images, always try to find the best possible image (and biggest, size-wise – 2 MB or more) that you can – preferably taken by a professional photographer. Don't send a tiny image from your website: it just won't look good on the page. Net result: you might have wasted your opportunity, as the reader skates on past to the next article with that great image in it.

If all else fails, and you are still struggling, engage the services of a professional writer – such as The Clarity Business!

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