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Copywriters and Copywriting

Given the importance of copy, it comes as no surprise that copywriters are key players in the advertising process. In fact, many of the most notable leaders and voices in the industry began their careers as copywriters, including Jane Maas, David Ogilvy, Rosser Reeves, Leo Burnett, and William Bernbach. As a profession, copywriting is somewhat unusual because so many of its top practitioners have been in their jobs for years, even decades (rather than moving up the management ranks as is usual in many professions). Copywriters can either work for agencies or set themselves up as free-lancers, selling their services to agencies and advertisers. Because it presents endless opportunities to be creative, copywriting is one of those rare jobs that can be fresh and challenging year after year.

Although successful copywriters share a love of language with novelists, poets, and other writers, copywriting is first and foremost a business function, not an artistic endeavor (see Exhibit 9.16). The challenge isn't to create works of literary merit, but to meet advertising objectives. This doesn't mean that copywriting isn't an art, however; it's simply art in pursuit of a business goal. Nor is it easy. Such noted literary writers as Stephen Vincent Benét, George Bernard Shaw, and Ernest Hemingway tried to write ad copy and found themselves unable to do it effectively.⁴⁸ It's the combined requirements of language skills, business acumen, and an ability to create under the pressure of tight deadlines and format restrictions (such as the limited number of words you have to work with) that make copywriting so challenging—and so endlessly rewarding.

Copywriters have many styles and approaches to writing, but most agree on one thing: copywriting is hard work. It can involve a great deal of planning and coordinating with clients, legal staffers, account executives, researchers, and art directors. In addition, it usually entails hammering away at your copy until it's as good as it can be. David Ogilvy talked about doing 19 drafts of a single piece of copy and writing 37 headlines for a Sears ad in order to get 3 possibilities to show to the client.⁴⁹ Actually, the chance to write and rewrite that many times is a luxury that most copywriters don't have; they often must produce copy on tight schedules with unforgiving deadlines (such as magazine publication deadlines).

The task of copywriting is most often associated with the headlines and copy you see in an ad, but copywriters actually develop a wide variety of other materials, from posters to catalogs to press releases, as well as the words you hear in radio and television commercials. This section examines what copywriters write, starting with the key copy elements of print ads.

PRINT COPY

Copywriters are responsible for every word you see in print ads, whether the words are in a catchy headline or in the fine print at the bottom of the page. The three major categories of copy are headlines, body copy, and slogans.

Headlines

The **headline**, also called a *heading* or a *head*, constitutes the dominant line or lines of copy in an ad. Headlines are typically set in larger type and appear at the top of the ad, although there are no hard-and-fast rules on headline layout.⁵⁰ **Subheads** are secondary headlines, often written to move the reader from the main headline to the body copy. Even if there is a pageful of body copy and only a few words in the headline, the headline is the most important piece of copy for two reasons: First, it serves as the “come-on” to get people to stop turning the page and check out your ad (see Exhibit 9.17). Second, as much as 80 percent of your audience may not bother to read the body copy, so whatever message these nonreaders carry away from the ad will have to come from the headline.⁵¹

Copywriters can choose from a variety of headline types, each of which performs a particular function:⁵²

- *News headlines.* News headlines present information that's new to the audi-




EXHIBIT 9.16
Creative, with a Business Purpose


It might have been tempting to talk at length about the glories of the great outdoors or the pleasures of solitude, but the copy in this ad (and the visual) works toward promoting the product. The outdoors and solitude play a role, but it's a role directed at selling a product.

EXHIBIT 9.17
The Power of a Great Headline

Proving that great headlines don't have to be short, noted copywriter Tom McElligott makes it hard to pass by this ad for *Glamour* magazine.



"FOR YEARS I HID MY INTELLIGENCE SO GUYS WOULD LIKE ME. THEN I NOTICED THE ONLY GUYS WHO LIKED ME WERE STUPID."

This one magazine took to announce the new women talk to a reader. It's not everything women are about. That's why every month we have an exciting new cover to discuss the women. Why not make your product part of the solution? 

WOMEN'S MAGAZINE WANTS YOU TO KNOW

ence, such as announcing a new store location, a new product, or lower prices. This approach is common because potential customers are often looking for new solutions, lower prices, and other relevant changes in the marketplace. For example, a newspaper ad from the Silo home electronics chain announced a recent sale using a news headline: "Everything on Sale! 4 Days Only! 5-20% Off Everything!"⁵³ Headlines like this are typical in local newspaper advertising.

- **Emotional headlines.** The emotional appeal described earlier in the chapter is represented by emotional headlines. The quotation headline "I'm sick of her ruining our lives" was used in an ad for the American Mental Health Fund to echo the frustration some parents feel when they can't understand their teenagers' behavior. Combined with a photo of a sad and withdrawn teenage girl, the headline grabs any parent who has felt such frustration, and the body copy goes on to explain that families shouldn't get mad at people with mental illnesses but should help them get treatment for their conditions.⁵⁴
- **Benefit headlines.** The benefit headline is a statement of the key customer benefit. An ad for Quicken personal finance software used the question-form headline: "How do you know exactly where your money goes and how much you have?" followed by "It's this simple" above a photograph of the product package.⁵⁵ The customer benefit is keeping better track of your money, and Quicken is the solution offered.
- **Directive headlines.** Headlines that direct the reader to do something, or at least suggest the reader do something, can motivate consumer action. Such headlines can be a hard sell, such as "Come in now and save," or they can be something more subtle, such as "Just feel the color in these black and whites," the headline in an ad for Ensoniq keyboards.⁵⁶
- **Offbeat and curiosity headlines.** Humor, wordplay, and mystery can be effective ways to draw readers into an ad. An ad promoting vacation travel to Spain used the headline "Si in the dark," with a photo of a lively nighttime scene. The word *Si* is catchy because it first looks like an error, until the reader reads the body copy to learn that the ad is talking about Spain (*si* is Spanish for "yes").⁵⁷
- **Hornblowing headlines.** The hornblowing headline, called "Brag and Boast" heads by the Gallup & Robinson research organization, should be used with care. Customers have seen it all and heard it all, and "We're the greatest" headlines tend to sound arrogant and self-centered. This isn't to say that you

IBM PC Image Processing Highlights. No. 3 in a series.

Why clown around in black and white when you can do it in color... just as easily.

The DT2011 Frame Grabber
The most highly rated.

Now, starting from reevaluation to color image processing, it is easy to drag out DT2011 (HSD) Color Frame Grabber into your IBM PC AT compatible computer.

The DT2011 is easy to use. It has color capture and display. It also performs real-time RGB and HSV color space conversion by processing scanned images. It offers the real-green that of true saturation intensity device... instantly bring the look to

...to match from reevaluation to color image processing.

The DT2011 is easy to use. It has color capture and display. It also performs real-time RGB and HSV color space conversion by processing scanned images. It offers the real-green that of true saturation intensity device... instantly bring the look to

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Circle Reader Card No. 209

These are just a few of the 16,777,216 colors your PC AT can process using our (HSD) Color Frame Grabber.

Some color combinations may not grab you. But for the first time ever, our DT2011 (HSD) Color Frame Grabber and Aurora software let you grab, process, analyze, and display color images to real time on the PC AT. You can even import color images using the Tag Image File Format (TIFF).

As if that's not enough of a broadstroke, the DT2011 offers 512 x 512 x 32-bit pixel resolution, text and graphics overlays, and—grab that!—hardware hue, saturation, and intensity light speed processing.

Even if we don't have the greatest taste for colors, you have to admit our taste for technology is excellent. Give us a call today.

Call (608) 481-3700
In Canada, call (800) 268-6427

DATA TRANSLATION



This time you can try your hand at a pair of business-to-business ads.

These two ads promote the same product, a computer accessory that lets users process graphic images on their screens. Even without understanding the technical content of the ads, you can see the different approaches: The clown ad works with a familiar figure of speech (clowning around), whereas the "tacky dresser" ad might be more related to the benefit of color-image processing.

These two ads were tested by Readex, a research firm that specializes in testing business-to-business ads. For this exercise, you'll be interested in two figures from the Readex test: the percentage of the audience that remembered seeing the ad and the percentage that found it of interest.

Which of these two ads do you think scored higher on the "remembered seeing" test and on the "found of interest" test? Be prepared to explain your answers.

can't stress superiority; you just need to do it in a way that takes the customer's needs into account, and the headline must be honest. The headline "Neuberger & Berman Guardian Fund" followed by the subhead "#1 Performing Growth and Income Fund" blows the company's own horn but also conveys an important product benefit. Since investors look for top-performing mutual funds, the information about being number one is relevant.⁵⁸

- **Slogan, label, or logo headlines.** Some headlines show a company's slogan, a product label, or the organization's logo. Powerful slogans like Hallmark's "When you care enough to send the very best" can make great headlines because they click with the reader's emotions. Label and logo headlines can build product and company awareness, but they must be used with care. If the label or logo doesn't make some emotional or logical connection with the reader, the ad probably won't succeed.

Headlines often have maximum impact when coupled with a well-chosen graphic element, rather than trying to carry the message with words alone. In fact, the careful combination of the two can increase the audience's involvement with the ad, especially if one of the two says something ironic or unexpected that has to be resolved by considering the other element. A magazine ad for Easter Seals had the headline "After all we did for Pete, he walked out on us." At first, you think the birth-defects organization is complaining. Then you see a photo of Pete with new artificial legs, walking away from a medical facility. It's a powerful combination that makes the reader feel good about the things Easter Seals can do for people.⁵⁹

EXHIBIT 9.18
Communicating without Body Copy

In this ad, which ran in a consumer magazine in Panama, the French perfume company Jacomo gets its point across without any body copy.



Jacomo.
The perfumer.

Body Copy

The second major category of copy is the **body copy**, which constitutes the words in the main body of the ad, apart from headlines, photo captions, and other blocks of text. The importance of body copy varies from ad to ad, and some ads have little or no body copy. Ads for easy-to-understand products, for instance, often rely on the headline and a visual such as a photograph to get their point across (see Exhibit 9.18). In contrast, when the selling message needs a lot of supporting detail to be convincing, an ad can be packed full of body copy. Some advertisers have the impression that long body copy should be avoided, but that isn't always the case.⁶⁰ The rule to apply here is to use the "right" number of words. You might not need many words in a perfume ad, but you might need a page or two to cover a complex industrial product.

As with headlines, body copy can be built around several different formats. **Straight-line copy** is copy that takes off from the headline and develops the selling points for the product. **Narrative copy**, in contrast, tells a story as it persuades; the same selling points may be covered, but in a different context. **Dialog/monolog copy** lets one or two characters in the ad do the selling through what they are saying (see Exhibit 9.19). **Picture-and-caption copy** relies on photographs or illustrations to tell the story, with support from their accompanying captions.⁶¹

Slogans

The third major category of copy includes **slogans**, or *tag lines*, memorable sayings that convey a selling message. Over the years, Coca-Cola has used such slogans as "Coke is it," "It's the real thing," and "Always Coca-Cola."⁶² Slogans are sometimes used as headlines, but not always. Their importance lies in the fact they often become the most memorable result of an advertising campaign. You've probably got a few slogans stuck in your head. Ever heard of "Quality is job number 1," "Don't leave home without it," or "Melts in your mouth, not in your hand"?



Rose: The Minnesota Orchestra is putting on this opera called Falstaff—a really wonderful opera.

Todd: I would rather be dropped into a mountain of road salt. I would rather be dragged by a team of wild horses through burning hot desert sands. I am not an opera kind of person. I like to have a few beers.

Rose: So does Falstaff, Todd.

Todd: Have a few laughs.

Rose: Falstaff is very funny. Falstaff is an easy-to-love, light Italian opera about a fat, beer-swilling middle-aged guy. Who do you think that's starting to remind me of, Todd?

Announcer: Falstaff. A funny opera complete with English supertitles projected above the stage. See it Wednesday, November 7 and Friday, November 9 at Orchestra Hall. Call 371-5656 for tickets.

EXHIBIT 9.19 Dialog Copy

In this radio commercial, the Minnesota Orchestra could have tried talking directly to people in an effort to lure them into the opera, but these two characters get the message across in a more entertaining way.

The Korean automaker Hyundai recently switched back to the slogan “Cars that make sense,” which is a great way of expressing its desired positioning as a lower-cost but still reliable alternative to Japanese and U.S. cars. For several years, the company had used “Hyundai. Yes, Hyundai,” but “Cars that make sense” has proved to be a much more effective way to define the value it offers consumers.⁶³

BROADCAST COPY

Radio and television commercials present the copywriter with unique challenges and opportunities. Although there are many similarities between print and

CHECKLIST FOR PRODUCING EXCELLENT COPY

- A. Avoid clichés.
 - Create fresh, original phrases that vividly convey your message.
 - Remember that clever wordplay based on clichés can be quite effective.
- B. Watch out for borrowed interest.
 - Make sure you don't use inappropriate copy or graphics since they can steal the show from your basic sales message.
 - Be sure nothing draws attention from the message.
- C. Don't boast.
 - Be sure the ad's purpose isn't merely to pat the advertiser on the back.
 - Tout success when you must convince nonbuyers that lots of people just like them have purchased your product; this isn't the same as shouting “We're the best!”
- D. Make it personal, informal, and relevant.
 - Connect with the audience in a way that is personal and comfortable. Pompous, stiff, and overly “businesslike” tends to turn people away.
- E. Keep it simple, specific, and concise.
 - Avoid copy that sounds like it belongs in an ad, with too many overblown adjectives and unsupported claims of superiority.
 - Make your case quickly and stick to the point. This will help you get past all the barriers and filters that people put up to help them select which things they'll pay attention to and which they'll ignore.
 - Avoid copy that's confusing, meandering, too long, or too detailed.
- F. Give the audience a reason to read, listen, or watch.
 - Offer a solution to your audience's problems.
 - Entertain your audience.
 - Consider any means possible to get your audience to pay attention long enough to get your sales message across.