

## Copywriting as a Profit Center

by Gary Maxwell

The writing life is a blessed life. The God-given ability to string words together and have them all make sense is a gift indeed. And while many writers sit happily ensconced in their home office patiently sending out queries for their next assignment, a good deal are wondering how they can increase the returns from their writing efforts. Some who write full time are even wondering whether they'll have the money to make next month's rent payment.

As a writer, there are no limits to the variety of assignments that are out there--you know that. But many writers never think beyond the query-assignment-write it-get paid paradigm.

If you'll expand your thinking for a moment, I'd like to share with you an area of writing that is always in demand and pays you handsomely for your time--every minute of it.

This area of writing is Commercial Writing.

Also known as copywriting, commercial writing is writing to sell. Your job is to craft money-making copy for goods and services that explains, woos, and asks for the sale.

At first, this may seem crass and overtly "commercial" to you. "I write art," may be your reply. But if I had to guess, many would trade their "art" for commercial writing if they had to choose between paying their rent or being broke. This isn't to say that artful writing is bad or non-important. Far from it. But this area of writing should be viewed as another venue in which to use your God-given ability to help others sell their products or service. And at the same time, it should be viewed as another profit center for your writing talent.

Breaking In

Breaking into commercial writing isn't hard. As copywriter Bob Bly once said, the only requirement is the ability to write good copy. With that said, there are some techniques that need to be learned and learning these techniques isn't hard if you are already an accomplished writer. It simply requires that you get a "sales mentality" or "sales mindset." You also need to gain some understanding of the sales process and how to craft words that move your client through this process until they're ready to buy.

Space does not permit me to cover every facet of copywriting, but I'll give an overview. Keep in mind that there are many good books on copywriting to help you get started should you choose to go in this direction.

As I said, copywriting is writing to sell. Your job is to craft words (and yes, it is a craft) that help sell a product or service. The basic sales process that I previously mentioned is: Attention, Interest, Desire, Action. We'll quickly look at each step of the sales process.

### Attention

A prospect can't be sold unless you get their attention. In an article or an ad, the headline is what gets the attention of your prospect. In radio and television, it's the first few seconds. Good headlines are timely, factual, and should resonate with the reader so that they desire to read more. The headline is so important that it has been said that when you write a headline, as much as 80% of your dollar has been spent. This makes sense because if you fail to get the consumer's attention, you can forget about them reading your ad.

### Interest

Second in the sales process is Interest. After you have captured the prospect's attention, you need to create an interest in the product or service. You tell them about the benefits-- what they get out of it. After all, the consumer has a right to know what they are going to get for their hard-earned money.

### Desire

Third, you need to create a desire for the product. You do this by causing the prospect to see themselves with the desired benefit. You continue telling them what the product will do for them and how they will come out ahead by using it. You give them so many compelling reasons to buy that they can't help but see themselves with the product.

### Action

Lastly, after you have gained the prospect's attention, their interest, and their desire, the only remaining thing to do is ask for action. Or in other words, ask for the sale. Many sales are lost simply because someone forgot to ask for the sale. You repeat the benefits, add some features to justify the purchase and ask for the sale.

This was a brief overview. There are any number of good books on the subject of copywriting at Amazon.com or at your local bookstore. I recommend Bob Bly's "The

Copywriter's Handbook," to get started with learning how to craft persuasive copy.

Your next step is to find clients who need copywriting.

Prospecting

Finding copywriting clients isn't like searching for a home for your next article or book idea. With editors (God love 'em) you must have an idea that they just happen to like. If they like your idea, you get the sale. The next time, they may turn you down if your idea fails to excite them. With copywriting, there is always a need for your service. In fact, the only reason for a writer to not have copywriting clients is because they either don't want to do this type of writing, or they do not market their services effectively.

The easiest and most cost-effective way to reach copywriting clients is with your telephone.

By calling first and sending out your information only when asked for, you eliminate potential prospects who may waste your time or simply want to get you off the phone.

You can also try direct mail and send a one page sales letter to get the ball rolling. Send out enough letters and make enough phone calls and you will eventually get clients. The market is not a seller's market but it is pretty close to that. Even in the "recession" that we are supposed to be having, a freelance copywriter can still survive and thrive since hiring a freelancer is usually more cost effective than hiring an ad agency. So freelancers should always have enough work to go around.

The Pros and Cons

If the picture that I have painted in your mind is a rosy one, it's not far from the truth. But every rose has a thorn and commercial writing is no different.

By its very nature, writing is a solitary effort--unless you happen to be collaborating on a project. If you like working by yourself and don't mind the isolation, then you will find the pay and the perks of copywriting most enviable. You don't have a boss per se and are free to shedule your time as you see fit as long as the copy is turned in on time.

On the other hand, if you like working with others, the isolation of copywriting may not be for you. And even though I stated that you don't have a boss, I was only partially correct. If you prospect enough you will have plenty of them; they are called "clients." Never forget that the person who hires you for your copywriting skills is the boss.

For most writers, working by themselves is the norm so copywriting should simply be seen as an additional profit center. And a good-paying one at that. In most markets, a beginning freelance copywriter can charge \$50 and no one will blink. Charge any less and business-minded folk will wonder just how good you really are.

Copywriting or Commercial Writing is one of the best-paying writing jobs out there. And to help others in their pursuit of selling their product or service should give any copywriter a feeling of satisfaction and also one of importance. The power of words to move people and commerce should never be underestimated.

About the author

Gary Maxwell is a commercial writer based in Shrewsbury, Pennsylvania USA. With nearly 15 years of experience in business and industry, Gary brings extensive knowledge and understanding to the commercial writing arena. As a writer, he has published extensively at the local, regional, and national level, and as a proponent of the SOHO, his contributions can be seen in the latest edition of home-business expert Barbara Brabec's *Home Made Money: Bringing in the Bucks* (August 2003), as well as *The Linux Journal* (April 2003).