Writing effective copy for your webpages

This document is a guide for writing the copy (words) used on your webpages. The copy should provide clear and concise information to visitors about the products or services on this page. You know about your business and your customers and so we rely on you providing the copy for each webpage. We'll rewrite copy if it needs it and make sure its Search Engine friendly but we need the raw material to work from that only you can provide.

There are five stages to writing effective webpage copy –

1. **Know your audience**
2. **Choose relevant Keywords**
3. **Make your sales pitch**
4. **Anticipate your visitor's questions**
5. **Write a concise summary**

You need to follow these 5 stages for every product/service page you need to write copy for.

1. Know your audience

Before you start writing; think about who your audience is. If it's the general public, then you need to think about writing for the general public and don't include industry or technical terms that will baffle or alienate them. On the other hand, if you're selling engineering products to a specific industry sector, your copy should be aimed at them, as if you were speaking or writing to them and not to the general public.

2. Keywords

Search engines match a user's search with keywords and phrases found on your webpage in an effort to display the most relevant search results. Effective SEO (search engine optimization) copywriting requires the right combination of compelling content and pages that are optimized for search engines.

You need to start with a **list of 10 keywords or phrases** that **your target audience will use** to find this page via a search on Google. Write out a comprehensive list of all the keywords that apply to this page and then whittle them down to the ten most important. Remember to target your keywords to your intended audience.

Don't forget to include town or county names if they are appropriate; someone looking for carpet sales and installation will almost certainly include their town in any search for a local carpet business.

Include your business name in the list of keywords only if the audience will have heard of it.

3. Make your sales pitch

Copy for each of your product or service pages should consist of at least 150 words, including bullet points etc. Consider the points below and anything else you think is important to get across to your audience and cover these points in short, two or three sentence paragraphs. Make sure you try to include each of your keywords or phrases at least twice in the copy, the more, the better.

Things to consider –

3.1 What is the product/service?
Ask yourself: *Have we spelled out, clearly and in simple language, what the product is?*
3.2 What does the product/service do for its target user?
Ask yourself: *Have we laid out the product's primary features and benefits in a clear, concrete way?*

3.3 Keep most copy short
When coming to a product/service page the visitor will expect to read a description of the product or service, how it can help them and why it's better than the existing/rival products or services. Keep copy short and to the point but make sure you cover all the important points you want to make and the obvious questions your visitors will have about the product or service.

3.4 Keep short copy simple
The complexity of your copy matters as much as its length. Make sure visitors can understand short copy on its first reading, without stopping to think about it. (They won't.)
Typically, you can convey one key idea effectively in one or two lines. You can sometimes get two, if they're both simple. Don't try for three; try to say too much and you ruin the chance that even the first idea will get through.
If you anticipate that readers will want to learn more about something they find on a page where they weren't expecting a lot of copy, we can add a link to another page or a word/pdf download where they can get all the information they need.

3.5 Organize longer copy effectively
Even when visitors are expecting to find a text-heavy page, they won't necessarily be willing to put much effort into reading it. Make it easy for them by dividing distinct ideas into separate paragraphs, using helpful headings, sub-headings and bulleted lists, and introducing key ideas deliberately.
Don't assume readers will read longer pieces of text in their entirety - write the copy so that readers can skim it and read only the parts they're interested in.
Longer copy needn't be as direct as short copy, but it must be just as easy to read. If your visitors have to work too hard to understand what it's saying, they'll stop reading.

3.6 Make it lively
Be clear, but don't be boring. Write vividly and aim for a light, unassuming tone of voice. It takes a little while for boring or overbearing copy to affect a reader, but once it does, practically nothing you say with it will get through.

3.7 Use a consistent voice throughout

The more consistent a voice you create – and the better it speaks to your intended audience in particular – the quicker your visitors will recognize it and become familiar with it. And the more familiar it is to them, the more effective it will be.

3.8 Let the facts speak for themselves

Don't talk down to or past your audience. Make your descriptions compelling, but not excessive. Web readers read hype as hype, and remember it that way, too. Skip it.

4. Anticipate your visitor's questions

What will your audience want to know about the product or service you're selling?
Your day to day interaction with customers will give you a good understanding of the sort of questions visitors to the site will have. You need to provide answers to these questions as well as making your sales pitch. If a visitor can't find what he's looking for he'll go elsewhere. Don't be afraid to give visitors the information they want, even if that information may be of use to your rivals.

5. Write a concise summary

Write a concise, two or three sentence summary about what the product is, what it does and how it helps its users or is better than its rivals.
This short paragraph should summarise the main points you want to get across. If your audience reads nothing else, then this paragraph should cover all the important stuff. This will serve as an introduction to the page.

Why write your copy this way?

We know from many studies, that the audience will often come to a website after a search on Google, and will already have a good idea what they're looking for. When the webpage appears, they will quickly scan any headings or subheadings and initially read only the content that applies to them.
Breaking your content down into short paragraphs with clear headings will help your audience find what they're looking for quickly.

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