

9 Copy
Basics
for
Business

by Gareth Jones

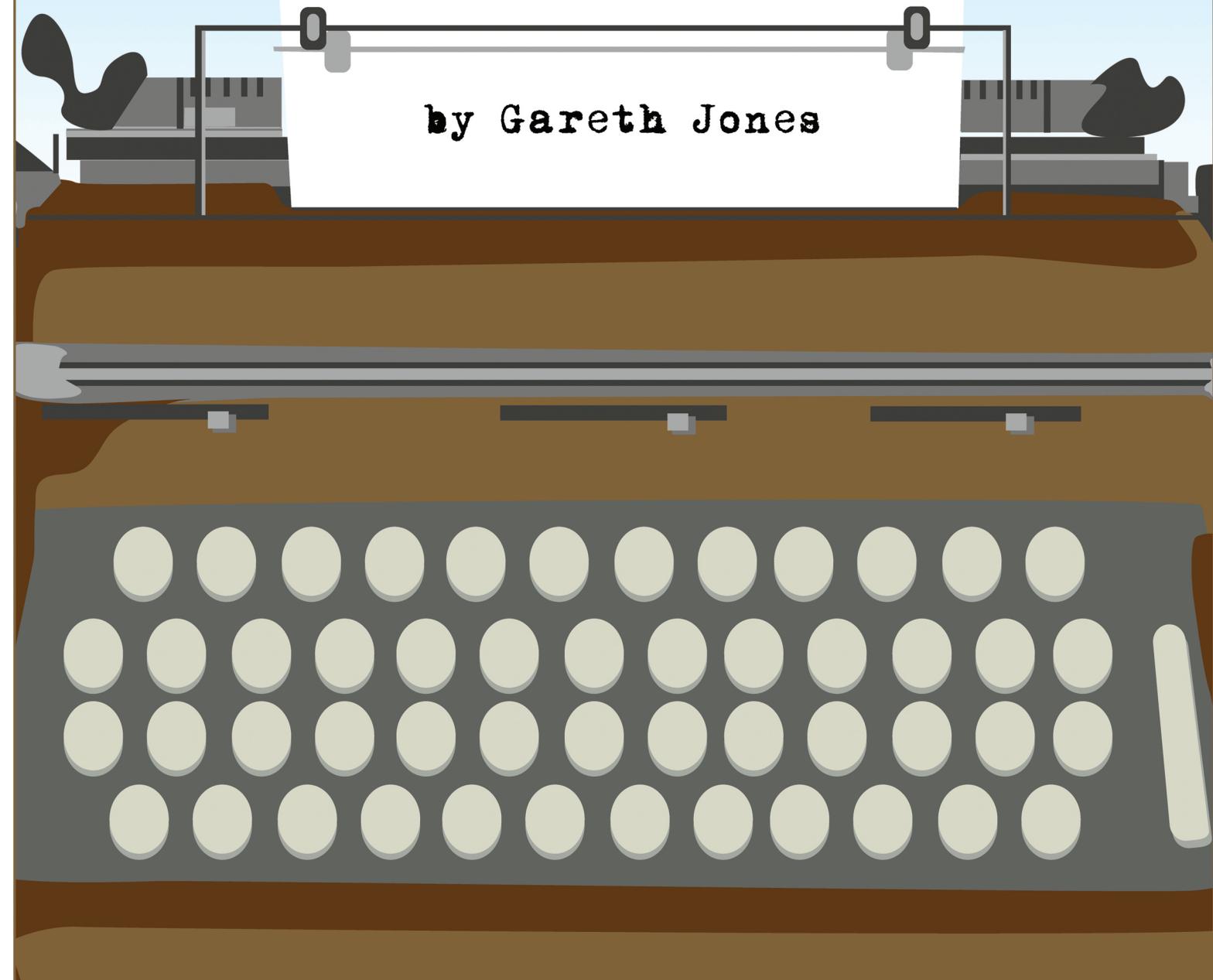


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Introduction

We both know that the world of business is a rapid one, and sometimes you need copy FAST.

Imminent deadlines can leave you with no time to source a professional copywriter, especially if you're managing a start-up or SME lacking a dedicated, full-time marketing and PR department.

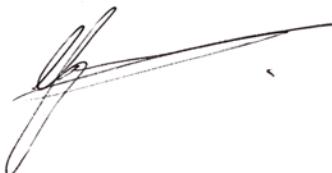
This guide is your go-to book for a bite-sized outline of the layout and expected content of various copy forms, along with more advanced techniques that will help you to create effective copy even if you've had to do it yourself, or delegate to a non-copywriter member of staff for quick turnaround.

Or maybe you just have an interest in copywriting, and are looking for an overview of what you may need to supply to clients who need words that actually work for them.

Either way, here's your one-stop shop to basic copy competency – so print it out and keep it handy...

You never know when you'll need it.

To your success,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gareth Jones".

Gareth Jones
www.thecopycrypt.com

Advertorials

Advertorials can be a tremendous method of getting your product into the mind of your prospects. Essentially, an advertorial is an advertisement in disguise!

Have you ever been reading a magazine and come across an article that you didn't realise wasn't part of the standard publication content until you noticed a little "This is an advertisement" flag or similar at the top or bottom of the page?

Yep – that's an advertorial! The name comes from the simple combination of 'advertisement' and 'editorial', and it succinctly describes what they're all about.

Advertorials will commonly be written in a style very similar to the expected content of the publication within which they're placed – for example you could expect to see an advertorial selling solid state hard drives inside a consumer tech magazine, or one promoting a real-time gameplay recording system inside a magazine dedicated to video games.

Having them placed in the correct publications means that there is a higher chance of a prospect actually being in the middle of reading it before they've even noticed that it's an ad. That's a major plus, and can allow you to communicate with prospects who would have simply skipped straight over a traditional advertisement.

The greatest advantage of an advertorial is that it is **informative** – or at least it *should* be. While obviously geared towards making the sale, the advertorial appears as though its primary goal is to educate the reader – to provide knowledge that they were lacking.

This is often an effective technique to squeeze into a more pitch-oriented direct response sales letter, but the advertorial seeks to harness it completely while still maintaining the sales message.

Practice makes perfect with these, as often the tutorial/informational aspects of the copy can overwhelm your sales message. Get the balance right, however, and you create a very strong link between you, your prospect, and your product.

A few tips on advertorials:

- Write in the style of your target publication. The advertorial should read like a standard article – the kind a reader would expect when opening that particular magazine or paper at a random page.
- Tutorials work well here. Draw a picture with your description of the steps the prospect would use in order to get the most out of your product. Make them see themselves using it, and how it enhances their life or solves problems for them.

- Use case studies* to further reinforce the above. Include quotes from happy customers or influential people in your company – for example the CEO, or the lead scientist or developer behind your product. Including these voices of authority amidst the informative article style bolsters credibility.
- Include a call to action at the end. Just like any sales piece, you need to make sure that the customer leaves it aware of your offer and encouraged to take you up on it.

*Case studies are not covered in this booklet, but you can get in touch with me at gareth@joneswriter.com for more information on the incredible benefit to your business that these can provide.

Banner Ads

Banner advertisements can be written either for the web – you're likely already used to seeing them just about everywhere – or for physical print and display outside your business premises, on rented ad space either on the high street, or in print magazines and newspapers.

On a banner ad, space is key. You don't have much of it, so you need to get your message across in as few words as possible.

First, get the basics of your message together:

- What are you advertising in the banner? What is the current campaign focus?
- What is your customer going to get from what your banner is advertising? What are the benefits for them?

Write these down as a short paragraph; for example:

"With this campaign we are focusing on our limited free consultation sessions for new business owners. They're going to save on the cost of our expertise, boost the efficiency of their business and reduce stress."

Now break it down to as few words as possible, speaking directly to your target customer.

Be ruthless. Chop words like a maniac until you have only the most essential points remaining. This will probably only be a collection of seemingly random words. That's good.

Your message needs to be succinct, informative and **compelling**. You need to make sure that your prospect is convinced that they could benefit from your offer.

Now rearrange and join those important words together with as few additions as possible.

Your laid-out message becomes something like:

"FREE expert, business-boosting consultation for new entrepreneurs."

REMEMBER: You must also include a call to action.

You need to tell your customer what you want them to do – whether that's "CLICK HERE!" in an online ad or "Call xxxx xxxx NOW!"

On the web, the banner will usually lead to a landing page which lays out the details on your offer (containing further marketing copy). In the physical world, the prospect will call your offices directly to seek more information. Make sure that you're ready to provide it.

Sales Pages & Direct Marketing

When a prospect clicks the link from your online banner ad or marketing email, you might be taking them to a sales-oriented landing page for that particular offer, product or service.

Being little more than a page designed to persuade the reader to purchase a product or take you up on your offer, sales pages have much in common with direct response sales letters.

While this guide is not designed to go into the specifics of direct marketing, I'll let you in on a few of the secret ingredients to copy that really gets the response you're looking for:

- Use a compelling headline that ensures that the prospect continues reading.
- Your lead follows next. This should directly address the prospect. Talk in their language.
- Write in your speaking voice – read the copy aloud to make sure it sounds authentic the whole way through.
- Address the prospect's problem early. Show that you understand them, what they need, and the frustrating consequences that the problem is forcing upon them, and then...
- Position your product as the solution to the problem. How it avoids those consequences occurring... and produces positive results instead.
- Use emotion. Focus on how the prospect feels right now, and how they will feel once your product improves their current situation.
- Draw a picture with your words. Make the prospect see themselves and their lives – personal or working, depending on your product – improved by their purchase.
- "Benefits, benefits, benefits" – Don't just talk about what your product is and does (features). Focus on the benefits – what it improves in the customer's life.
- Use proof. Gather testimonials and add details of awards that your company, product, or service has won. This adds much-needed credibility to your claims.
- Make your offer hard to refuse then and there – combine your offer with scarcity. Limited availability drives quick response, but...
- Always give a reason for the scarcity of your offer – for example stock clearance necessity or simply an introductory price. Never underestimate the power of "because". It lends authenticity to your offer.
- Provide a specific end-date or limit to your offer. Again, specifics are good – but you have to stick with them. If you drag on your offer beyond the initially given closing date, you will lose trust and reputation.
- Close the deal and ask them to do something. Ensure that there is a clear call to action at the end, either in the form of an order link ("ORDER NOW!"), email capture

form etc. on an online page, or a mail-in slip or request to call or email you, on a printed letter.

- Use a Postscript! Add a P.S. at the bottom of the letter to really bring the sale home. In most cases, your P.S. will simply restate your offer – the overall reason behind the letter – in a short sentence or two... and will again repeat an urgent call to action. Make sure it sounds enthusiastic – like you got carried away somehow and just had to add something more to your message.
- A good general rule to abide by is to use plenty of 'white space' in your writing. Keep sentences and paragraphs short – four lines maximum. People don't like reading walls of text. Bullet point lists are very effective in succinctly listing benefits.
- Once your letter is written, go back through it with the "so what?" factor in mind. Remove or further reinforce the benefits at any point that the reader could simply say "so what?" when they read your words. Leave them no opportunity to think that they shouldn't care about what they are reading.

Physically, a landing page or direct response letter will be laid out just like any other piece of personal correspondence. It should read like a letter from you to the customer – as though you simply decided to contact them because you felt that they really ought to know about your product or service.

What sets them apart from your standard everyday letter between friends is largely the use of a **headline**. This is the entry-point to your letter and pitch – so it has to get the reader's attention, and ensure that they continue on to the rest of your copy.

A few key points on headlines:

- Keep it just long enough to make your point. Not too long, not too short. Err on the side of shorter if unsure. You can usually get the point across in fewer words than you think – never waffle at any point of your letter.
- It should promote the uniqueness of your offer. What sets your product apart from the competition?
- It should refer to specifics – for example specific expected savings or a specific timeframe.
- It should directly address the problem that your prospect is seeking to solve. Work one or more benefits of your product or service into your headline for maximum effect.
- It should imply urgency – they need to read your letter NOW to avoid missing out.

Your headline is incredibly important. It's the single message that needs to get your prospect's attention – that almost entirely convinces them right away that your product or service is something that they need. The rest of your letter simply confirms that notion.

Email Marketing

An email written with the intention of selling your products or services, or encouraging customers to take up your current offer, has a lot in common with a direct response sales letter.

Emails should feel like direct message from you/your business to each recipient. This means that it should ideally address them by name, or a direct title (for example, "Dear Friend"). Starting with "Dear Customers" or "Dear Fans" removes that one-to-one connection from the very beginning, and can quickly undermine even the best of efforts that follow.

Your subject line is also vitally important. Of course, it needs to be short, but it also needs to offer something clearly of interest to the prospect. People receive tons of spam into their mailboxes every day, and without a compelling subject line that actually seems like it was written by a real person, your email barely stands a chance of being opened.

A simple way to do this is to entice the reader with your offer – straight away – and mention any limited availability. They have to feel that they should read your mail right now to avoid missing out. It's like a tiny direct response statement – the response required is opening the email!

Once the email has been opened, the customer should be presented with the details of your offer **as soon as possible**. An uninterested reader is a lost reader.

The digital trash bin for your effort is only ever a click away – so you need to grasp interest early, and hold onto it. This requires a strong lead, relevant to the reader and offering a clear benefit.

From there, simply employ the same direct marketing techniques that you would a sales letter – keep it conversational, keep the personal connection, and forge imagery of your reader enjoying the clear benefits of having purchased your product.

You must also ensure that you include a very clear call to action throughout your email. This should include specific instruction to "click here", or whatever it is that you want them to do. The reader should never be unsure of what you expect from them. If you want them to click a certain link, then mention that link 3 or 4 times in your body copy.

A huge boon provided by the affordability of email marketing is the option of setting up an auto-responder sequence that will regularly mail prospects from your mailing list, keeping you in their minds consistently and building a positive relationship.

Each follow-up email should be scheduled on a regular basis, otherwise you risk your list going stale and disengaging from your content.

Sending the same email repeatedly also won't do. If each email isn't fully utilising the key techniques of direct sales letters and providing members of your mailing list with new information, new *value* and a new approach, they'll feel as though you're just badgering them with the same pitch over and over again.

That's when things begin to *feel* automated – and you don't want that. Each email needs to feel like it is as personal and relevant as the first – that you know you sent your subscriber something previously and are following up, not repeating yourself.

Making use of 'open loops' – in their simplest form a curious promise of something good to come – at the end of each email is an efficient way of keeping your subscribers looking forward to your next appearance in their inbox.

A successful auto-responder sequence leading up to the sale of a specific product takes time and effort to map out and create – each email a distinct entity working towards a larger goal – but the rewards can be well worth the time taken.

If you don't already use an autoresponder sequence, check out the likes of Aweber, MailChimp, GetResponse and Infusionsoft online.

Fundraising Letters

Just like a direct sales letter, fundraising letters are laid out just like a piece of standard correspondence, however...

In a sales letter, you have a product or service for which you can espouse the various features and benefits, and what the customer will be receiving in return for their money.

In fundraising and charity donation, of course, they get nothing tangible – nothing that is going to make an actual difference to their everyday lives.

Because of this, fundraising letters rely the heaviest on emotion and storytelling. A few pointers for crafting an effective fundraiser are:

- Craft a compelling, emotive headline that relates to, and will lead into...
- A storyline. Create a genuine story of hardship, heartache and the overcoming of adversity. Using the three-act 'Hero's Journey' storytelling method is a good way to start.
- Bring your story alive with detail. Make the reader feel the cold and loneliness of homelessness, the fear of abuse, or the joy of children that they can provide.
- Talk directly to the reader. Where in a business letter you may take a more professional, frank approach, fundraising relies on making a deeper personal connection. Be conversational and let the personality of the speaker come through more intimately.
- Be specific when referring to the benefits that donated money will provide. Lay out the costs of a few things that the organisation provides. People like to know exactly what they're giving money towards.
- Introduce urgency. Remember: this is a sales letter, in essence – yet it can be much more urgent. A donation **today** can save lives **tomorrow**... lives that may otherwise be lost.
- Always include a call to action. Let the reader know how they can donate, and instruct them to do it right away.

IMPORTANT: Remember to use real stories for your storytelling. You can't simply make up the tale of 'Rick' who was made homeless and found his way back to health and wellbeing via your charity. To do so is akin to making up fake testimonials for a product, and is against advertising codes across most of the world. Some dramatic embellishment is fine, of course, but the core 'plot points' must be truthful.

These details can be gathered as part of performing **case studies** with beneficiaries or practitioners in your organisation. **Case studies** are extremely helpful in building a catalogue of proof and stories for your letters that can be used time and time again. Case studies are not covered in this booklet, but you can get in touch with me at gareth@joneswriter.com for more information on the incredible benefit to your business that these can provide.

Press Releases

Get the word out! Something has happened in your business and you think the world (or your locality) ought to hear about it!

So how do you do that?

You create and send a press release!

Now, there's no guarantee when you send a press release to a journalist at a newspaper or other outlet that they're actually going to decide to report on it, or even follow it up.

Journalists are swamped in press releases most of the time – trust me, I know! – and have to decide which ones are most relevant to their readership.

Relevant means *informative* and *interesting*. Your press release can't just be a sales pitch. It has to be genuine **news** – an actual **story**. Anything less will most likely be ignored.

When writing your press release, you'll want to have it look as close to an actual news article as possible. That means including a **headline**, **sub-headings** if necessary, and maintaining a **neutral, informative tone**.

The closer it looks and reads to a fully completed news article, the more likely it is to be successfully picked up by busy journalists who can use your copy. This is especially true in online journalism where digital press releases fly in thick and fast.

In terms of format, you are expected to include the phrase "FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE" at the very beginning, before your headline. This tells the journalist that they are free to immediately print the news contained within your release.

If you do not wish for the news to be revealed until a certain date, the very beginning of your release should state "EMBARGO UNTIL <DATE>". This tells the journalist not to reveal anything publicly until the date specified on your release.

Next up is your **headline** – what's it all about? What's the big story that'll catch peoples' eyes?

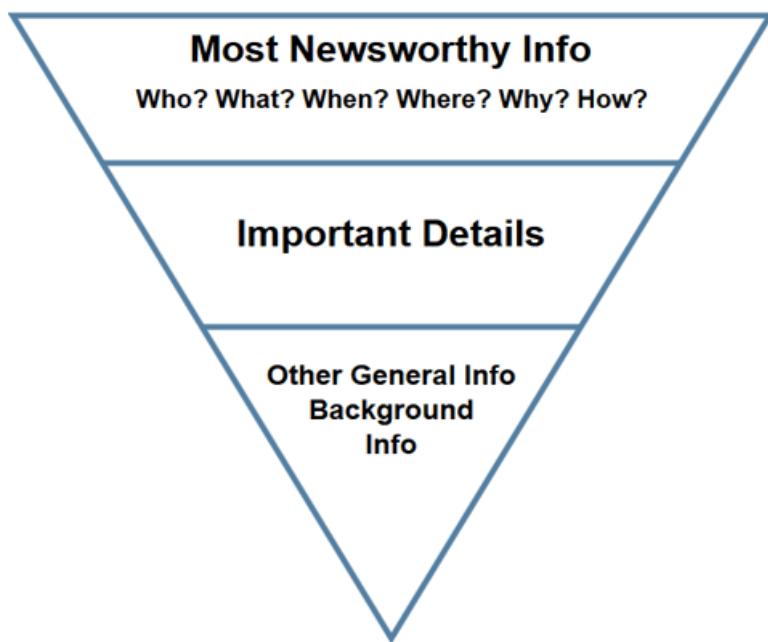
After that, the **dateline**. This forms the beginning of your introductory paragraph, and states where the news originates, and the date on which you are releasing it – for example "NOTTINGHAM, UK, April 2, 2014 –".

Now you get into the meat of the story. The **Who, What, When, Where** and **Why** of it all, in as few words as possible.

Next, expand on these main details a little further with supporting info, and back things up with quotes from relevant people or organisations. Finish with a short bio and further contact details.

Ensure that each section is separate from the others, so that journalists can pick and choose which to employ in their own piece.

The layout of a press release's content is usually referred to as 'the inverted pyramid', which looks something like this:



NOTE: Datelines are somewhat old fashioned nowadays, and not used very often in online (email) press releases. In print, though, you still see them a lot of the time.

In a nutshell, as long as you remain neutral, impersonal, informative (yet brief) and include quotes pertaining to your news – just like the majority of news items that you see every day – your release stands a good chance of making it to the page (or website) that you're after!

Product Descriptions

There's far more to an effective product description than a basic "This is a nice, stainless steel spoon. It lets you lift soup up to your face without it spilling through gaps like it would on a fork."

Whether you run an online business or produce your own catalogues, you need to create product descriptions that give every single item maximum selling power. Your description is a mini sales pitch for your product – the challenge is that you don't get much space to do it in.

Here are a few tips to getting the most out of your descriptions:

- Clearly explain the physical aspects of the product. Size, colour, price and any other pertinent information. Make sure the customer knows exactly what they're going to receive in the box, but...
- Don't get lost in describing features. Make sure you dedicate enough space to persuasion. The goal is, after all, to sell the product.
- Make it interesting. Your copy doesn't have to be bland and drab just because it's a description. Liven it up with a story – as per the most effective sales writing, paint a picture for your prospect with your words. Make them imagine themselves using the product.
- Make it exciting. If it's product that is designed for excitement, then your copy should be, too!
- Know your prospect. Make sure that the description speaks to them in their language. Use that to decide whether you will focus on specifications, benefits or imagery.

Some of my personal favourite product descriptions can be found at Firebox.com. Check them out and study how well they know their customers and market – spicing up their descriptions with casual, irreverent humour to great effect.

Of course, you wouldn't use product descriptions like they do in a business catering to high fashion or children – but their approach is a great indicator of how to keep even your product descriptions speaking your brand's language.

Search Engine Advertising/Adwords

Search engine advertising, such as Google Adwords, works much on the same principle as banner ads – but you might get a bit (just a bit!) more space to play with.

Generally, you'll get space for a headline, a couple of lines within which to make your pitch, and a URL that leads to your website or landing page.

Getting all of them right is crucial. This can generally be done in a few easy steps:

1. Pick the keyword or keywords that you want your ad to be found by. These should be included in your headline or body copy – ideally both. Note them down.
2. Take your existing sales letter (if you have one) for this promotion, and pick out the key words that explain what it is, and the benefits (see chapter on Banner Ads for more information).
3. Combine these, and link them together to form a coherent sentence.
4. Chop ruthlessly at it, until you have five to seven words per line. Remember, you are limited in characters and space, so be sure to check how much you have with your particular choice of search engine.

So, if you're offering a free consultation to new businesses to help improve their launch and business efficiency, you could end up with:

Make Your Startup a Success

Expert Startup Advice, FREE Consultation

Discover how to launch a winner

www.startupconsultants.biz

You'll likely need to make a few variations of your ad, targeting different specific keywords – because it's seldom possible to squeeze all of your relevant keywords into one search engine ad (and if you did, it'd probably be terrible).

SEO Copy & Content

Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) copywriting is the process of writing copy that utilises a select combination of keywords in order to attract the attention of search engines – most commonly Google.

Your business will want to make use of this in order to make your web pages more relevant to your target market or industry. The more relevant the copy appears to Google's 'spiders', the more likely it is to appear on the first few pages of results when someone searches using your chosen keywords.

There are many, many factors that go into making a website a complete SEO success, in small and larger degrees, for example meta tags, image alt text, Google+ integration and – of great importance today – your website's speed, ease of use and social media exposure, but here we will only focus on body copy and writing for the likes of articles and product descriptions.

In theory, the process is quite simple:

1. Note down the keywords that you wish this particular page, or your site, to be targeted for.
2. Decide what the topic of your page or article is going to be, based on these keywords.
3. Write the article! Make sure to employ regular use of your designated keyword or phrases throughout.

If you find interesting keywords that are relevant to you, but you hadn't thought of before, look for some that feature a high number of searches, but low competition, and target those for some new content.

Once you're decided, a decent approach is simply to jump straight in! Write your article or page copy, and then go back over it and re-work, adjusting it in order to add keywords organically wherever they would make sense.

The important thing here is that your copy must read naturally. It must flow like a regular piece of writing, and have an actual point to it – so it should be relevant to your customers, and it should be relevant in some way to the rest of the content on your site. It should be written for the human eye, and to allow this, you can also use *partial* keywords.

If, for example, your target keyword was 'copywriting', you should ensure that you use 'copywriting', 'copy', 'writing' and perhaps 'copywriter' and 'copywriters' as variants

throughout your article. Of course, your keyword search may show you other words or phrases that rank similarly highly on the same topic – so you can also use those, and variants alongside.

'Keyword stuffing' is a thing of the past. In previous years, websites could get away with simply chucking a ton of keywords on pages (normally crammed into the bottom of every page on the site!), and end up ranking highly on Google. Nowadays, this is actively penalised. So don't do it.

This is why it's so important that your copy actually reads well and has a useful function.

If it's well-written, informative, relevant to you and contains smart use of keywords (I would argue that keyword density isn't very important anymore... more than a few uses is likely wasted – to the detriment of your copy), then you're very much set at the basic level.

Make your content informative, practically useful, or just highly entertaining and you're likely to see it being shared and linked to once you reveal it on various social media channels. Active engagement and sharing of your content is very attractive to Google and will help raise your site in the rankings.

Achieving this can, in practice, be much harder than it sounds, though!

EXTRA TIP: When it comes to length, the minimum number of words for an SEO-friendly blog post or article is accepted to be around 300.

Many would say that the 'sweet spot' is 500, but there really is no upper limit. If your content needs to be as long as 2000 or 3000 words, that's fine (and gives you more opportunity for keyword use), but it must remain engaging for the reader.

In fact, did you know that a study by serpIQ demonstrated that the average content length for pages ranking in the top 10 results for any keyword on Google was at least 2000 words?

Regardless, there is no hard and fast rule. As long as you're writing good, informative content and not a stream of rambling fluff, you'll be fine.

You just want readers to appreciate and share your content on social media and discussion forums. This leads to back-links and noticeable engagement – increasing relevance and, in turn, Google's favourable outlook on your site.

About the Author

Gareth Jones is a freelance copywriter, proofreader and journalist based in Nottingham, UK and owner of The Copy Crypt.

With nearly a decade of experience writing content and copy within the film industry, he also specialises in direct marketing for fundraising and sales and consumer and corporate case studies, using persuasive storytelling methods to increase response and drive revenue.

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