

Secrets Of Successful Websites

Quick and easy ways to write
copy for your website

&

How to hire, brief and get the most
from a professional web content writer



Forward

If you're about to get a website built or are revamping your existing website, this could be the most important eBook you ever read.

It could save you a lot of money, time and headaches. Best of all, it might boost your business!

The purpose of this eBook is to give you some hints and tips on how to write copy for your website and, if you choose to outsource that work, how to brief, work with and get the best value from a professional copywriter.

Here's a summary of what it covers:

About Me

Secrets To A Successful Website

How To Create A Great First Impression

The Pros And Cons Of Using A Professional Copywriter

What Are Your Competitors Doing?

What Is The Creative Brief?

Why Do You Need A Creative Brief?

A Good Copywriter Is A Good Investigator

How Will The Copywriter Learn About Your Product or Service?

How Long Will It Take?

How Do You Complete The Brief?

Deciding On A Target Market

Creating The Features And Benefits List

Top 10 Reasons Why People Buy

How To Sell Your Benefits

Top 10 Questions To Ask A Copywriter

How To Find A Great Copywriter



“My work is based on four simple steps: Write. Share. Read. Inspire.”

About Me

After more than 12-years in the Melbourne media industry (and around 5000 coffees), I’ve mastered the art of freelance writing.

What’s the secret?

1. Ask the right questions

My background in print journalism means I know how to elicit the gold nuggets to make your copy – and business – stand out.

2. Stay relevant

You’ve probably noticed the media industry is changing, fast. That’s why I make professional development a priority. After winning a scholarship to complete a bachelor of Media Studies at La Trobe University in 2001, I’ve continued my learning at RMIT, the Australian Writers’ Centre and Media Entertainment & Arts Alliance. This means I’m across all the latest trends in print and digital writing so that I can contribute to your outlet with authority.

3. Create NEW content

You’re too busy to think about targeted article and blog topics, right? Let alone SEO savvy content. Finding new angles that are authentic and inspiring for your audience is my thing!

When I’m not at my keyboard, I’m usually trying to keep fit, or keep up with my two sons.



Secrets To A Successful Website

You already know this but your website will be one of the most important marketing tools you'll ever have. However, most people think that they can just launch a site and get new customers. Not true.

There are a few things that need to be done before a site can start generating new business.

The first one is obviously getting the site **designed and developed** and the second is **populating the site with content**, i.e. writing the words.

These two elements determine the success of a site. Here's why:

How To Create A Great First Impression

When you land on a website, the first thing you do is form an **impression** of that company. It takes about three seconds to generate this impression.

If you can't grab your prospects by the throat and give them compelling reasons to stick around in those first three seconds, they'll click out and on to your competitor's site.

How is this first impression created? Simple. It's based on two things. The first is the look of the site – the colours, font, feel and design of the website.

If the site looks messy, is difficult to navigate or hard to read, it's unlikely to convert visitors into paying customers.

That all-important first impression is also created based on the words you use on the site. The words, or 'copy, are critical to taking your prospect on the 'journey' as to why they should buy your product or service.

The words you use also determine how well you rank on Google and other search engines, so it's vital you use the right words that sell you in the right way.



The Pros And Cons Of Using A Professional Copywriter

You can write the words yourself, and if you're a great writer already, that's a cost-effective way to go. But if you're not a great writer, there are a few drawbacks to doing it yourself:

1. Do you have the time to write the words yourself? It takes time to write good copy and if you don't have the time to do it, your website will be delayed. For every day your website is not up, you're losing business.

2. Do you have the skill to write persuasive copy? Copywriting is both an art and a science and takes years to learn. The words you use will directly influence people's decision to buy from you. Sure, there's a cost to hiring a professional copywriter but (depending on the value of your service) just one or two new customers could pay for the entire copywriting job. Surely it's worth investing a few dollars to show off your business in the best possible light? After all, you've gone to a lot of effort to create a site so it'll be a shame to lose them just because the words you used weren't compelling.

3. Do you understand what is needed to get on page one of Google?

Did you know people don't even look past the fifth search result on page one*? So, not only do you have to be on page one, but you have to be listed in the *top five results* or you're just not being seen. The words you use on your site (both on the page and behind the scenes i.e. in the metatags) directly influence where Google rank you. If you think you can write those words yourself, go for it. If not, you need to hire a professional copywriter who's an expert at search engine optimisation (SEO) copywriting.

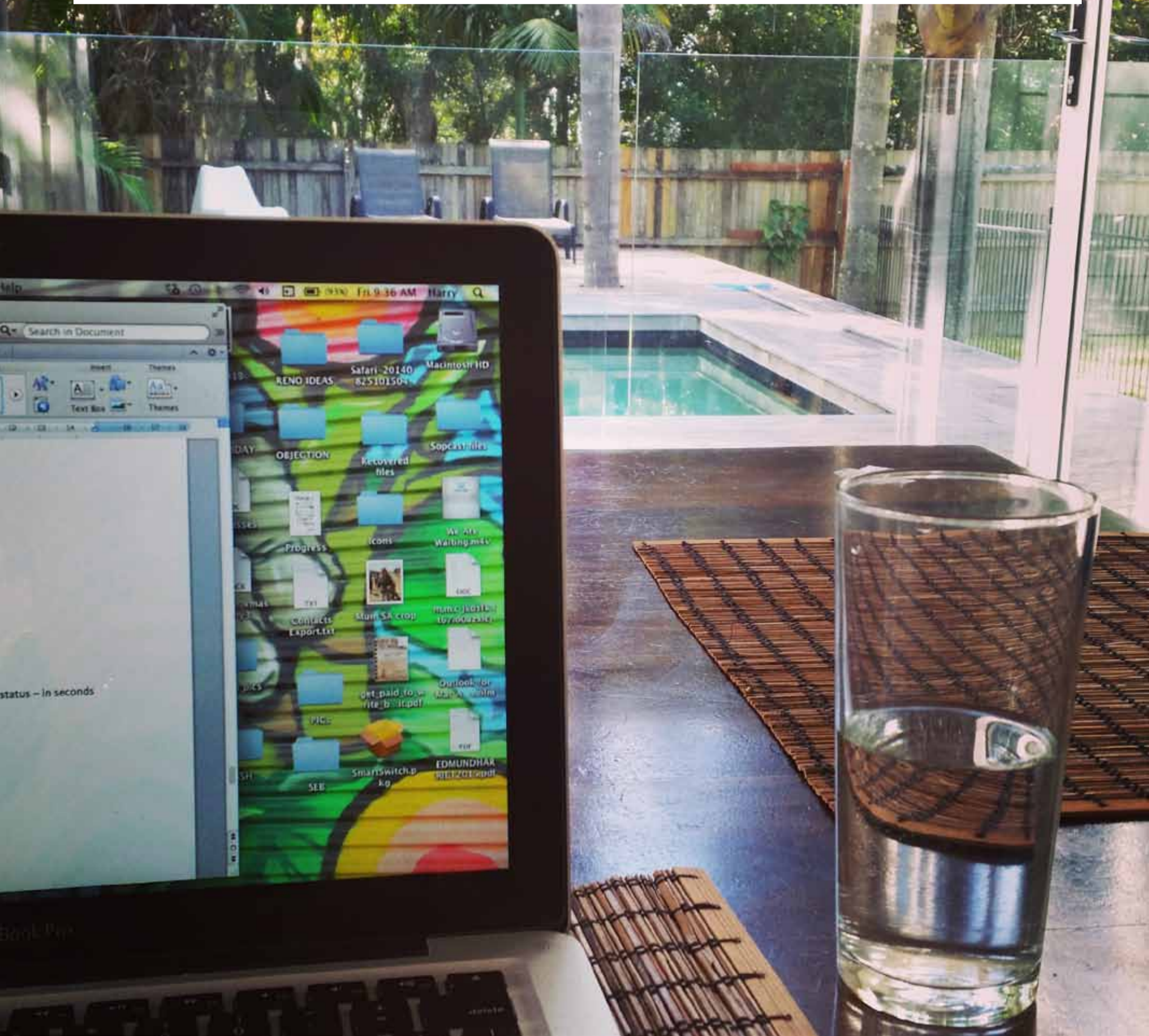
* Source: Jacob Nielsen, www.useit.com

“It takes time to write good copy and if you don't have the time to do it, your website will be delayed.”

4. Are you the best person to promote your business? This may seem like an obvious answer – you're probably thinking: 'Yes, I know my business better than anyone!' But that knowledge can also be a negative. Do you know the business so well that you can't see what the customer sees anymore? Maybe you've become jaded and can't see why people would choose you or alternatively, maybe you think you're better than you are and no-one has the guts to challenge you on whether that's true.

Most importantly, I provide an objective, honest and unbiased viewpoint that so many business owners can't find elsewhere.

“A professional copywriter is an expert at looking at your business with ‘fresh eyes’ and helping you find the gold nuggets that make your business stand head and shoulders above the rest.”



What Are Your Competitors Doing?

A copywriter will also look at what the competitors are doing and find a way to ensure you are the compelling winner. Customers have a vast array of competitor sites right at their fingertips and can access them with a click so we have to know what they're up to.

Not knowing what your competitors are doing is suicide for any business.

What Is The Creative Brief?

The Creative Brief, or The Brief as it is often referred to, is the basis of every website.

Your website developer will take one when you meet to get a sense of what your website will look and feel like, but as copywriters, we take one too so that we can find out what you want to achieve with the message on your website.

The Brief is a series of questions that need to be discussed between you and the copywriter.

**“The better the brief,
the better the copy.”**



Why Do You Need A Creative Brief?

The Creative Brief is the master document that states exactly:

1. What type of task is needed – a **5-page website, 10-page website, a website audit** etc.
2. What is the website about – **what is being promoted, what pages do you need and what will each page say.**
3. Who is being targeted – **who is most likely to buy from you.**
4. What aspects of the product we're going to promote – **what are the most important things you need to say about your product or service.**
5. Who your competitors are – **who else is doing what you're doing and what will make the reader choose you over them.**
6. Our key selling benefits – **what will the reader get out of doing business with you, why should they buy your product or service?**

...and much, much more.

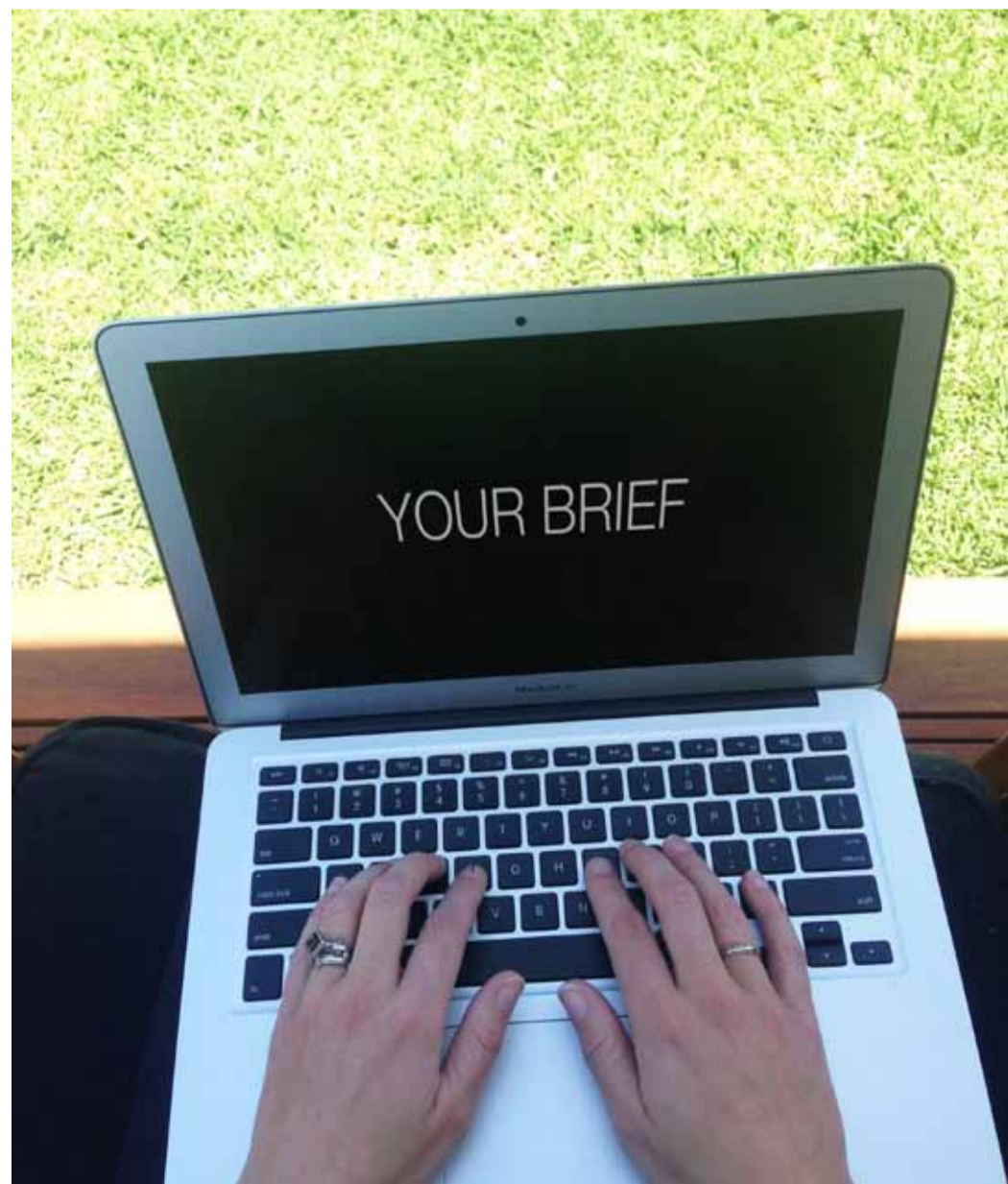
Website writing is a very subjective business, which creates room for error. To minimise misunderstandings and miscommunications, a Brief is the key document that both the writer and the client use as their touchstone.

You will save yourself hours and potentially lots of money if you give your copywriter a comprehensive and detailed brief at the *beginning* of the writing process.

A Good Copywriter Is A Good Investigator

You, as the client should have a deep understanding of your own business, but for lots of reasons, this is not always the case which means that your copywriter will use skillful questioning techniques to elicit this information from you – even if you don't think you know it!

You should consider your copywriter to be a 'consultant'; someone who not only writes your copy, but



someone who brings to the table a wealth of ideas, strategies, hints and tips that you may not have considered.

The role of a copywriter is to question, cajole, probe and generally quiz you on your views about your business, so be prepared to be asked lots of questions.

“Your copywriter is there to find out as much about your business as possible so they can write with authority about your product or service.”

It goes without saying that your copywriter understands the importance of confidentiality and is willing to sign a non-disclosure agreement if you think that's necessary.

Great copywriting work results from the copywriter being able to challenge you and your thinking so that nothing is taken for granted.

Some of the best content is written after the copywriter simply asks the client: “Why is that the case?” or “What makes you think that?” or “Where is the evidence for that?”

It's safe to say that you'll learn more about your business by sitting down with a copywriter than you will by virtually any other activity.



How Will The Copywriter Learn About Your Product or Service?

All good copywriters get very involved with their client's product. They are eager to absorb as much information about the product as they can so they can write with authority. To do this, they do some or all of the following:

- Use the product or service
- Visit the factory where it's made
- Talk to customers about their experiences with the product
- Watch videos/DVDs and read vast amounts of research material to educate themselves about the product
- Go on the road with the sales rep to see how the product is sold to customers
- Wander the aisles of supermarkets to witness how people choose a product ...and more.

If some of those personal visits are not possible or appropriate, a comprehensive telephone briefing will take place.

How Long Will It Take?

A copywriter briefing should be thorough so they do not have to come back to you for more information after the initial briefing is over. The briefing could take at least 60 to 90 minutes so it's worthwhile scheduling in that time when you decide to go ahead.

It may seem like a lot of time to invest but considering your website will be seen day-after-day, month-after-month, year-after-year, it pays to get it right up front. That way, you'll only have to update and tweak it as the years go on. This is much more cost effective than writing and re-writing on a regular basis.

**“Short term
pain for long
term gain.
Get the brief
right before
you begin.”**





How Do You Complete the Brief?

Included here is a Creative Brief template.

This is a template used in many advertising agencies around the world. There are other formats but they are all a variation on a similar theme.

You'll see there is a list of headings. Although these headings look straightforward and simple to answer, you'll find that it involves a fair bit of research and spade work to come up with a clear answer for each.

Your copywriter will need to delve deeply into the product to work out the answers to these questions.

And, by the way, we understand you may not know the answers to all these questions. That's okay. Your copywriter will step you through the process, but it will save you time and money if you've had a look at these questions before your copywriter takes the brief.

Here's a version of the brief your website copywriter will use to write your website text. As mentioned, you don't need to write anything down or fill anything out – that's the writer's job, but knowing what they'll ask you will save time and money and ensure a higher-quality result.

WEBSITE COPYWRITING CREATIVE BRIEF

Client Name:

Client Email and Ph #:

Name of Company:

Description of Product/Service: what does the business do/offer?

Date Required: when does the first draft of the web copy need to be ready?

Task: how many pages need to be written? Does it require SEO? Has the site been created from scratch or is it being revamped?

What Is the Primary Purpose of This Website? i.e. to sell products/services online, to provide information/build brand for the company, to give investors confidence in investing, to display a portfolio etc.

Objectives: what do you want people to do once they have landed on the site? Sign up to receive a newsletter, buy online, compare prices, download a brochure, request a quote/meeting/sales call etc.

Target Market: You may have more than one target market. Please nominate them in order of importance to you. Please be as specific as possible about the 'person' you are targeting, not just the type of industry/company.

Features and Benefits: What will this product/service do for your customers?
How will it make their lives richer, easier, happier?

Feature # 1:

Benefit # 1:

Feature # 2:

Benefit # 2:

Etc.

Supporting Evidence/Proof of Claim: what customer testimonials, examples, awards, accolades can you supply? Do you want the copywriter to source them for you?

Tone of Voice/Product Personality: nominate three or four words to describe the 'voice' of the website e.g. warm, friendly, officious, classy, blue collar, down to earth, elegant etc.

Competitors: please nominate three sites that you perceive to be in direct competition with you. What do you offer/do differently to them that will make a buyer choose you over them?

The Offer/Incentive: what you can offer the reader that will compel them to consider you (rather than the competitors). It needs to be high value and relevant, but low cost e.g. a free report, audit, consultation, DVD or eBook, an upgrade, a bonus gift, or a discount.

Essential Requirements/Mandatories: what must appear on the website e.g. trademarks, logos, disclaimers etc. Please list here in the correct wording.

Constraints: What can't we say or mention? Are there legal considerations about what we say or not say?

Deciding On A Target Market

When you get to the section called Target Market you need to ***Beware!*** This section is one of THE most important sections of the entire briefing document. You should spend more time on this section than any other section because if you get the Target Market wrong, the whole brief will be wrong.

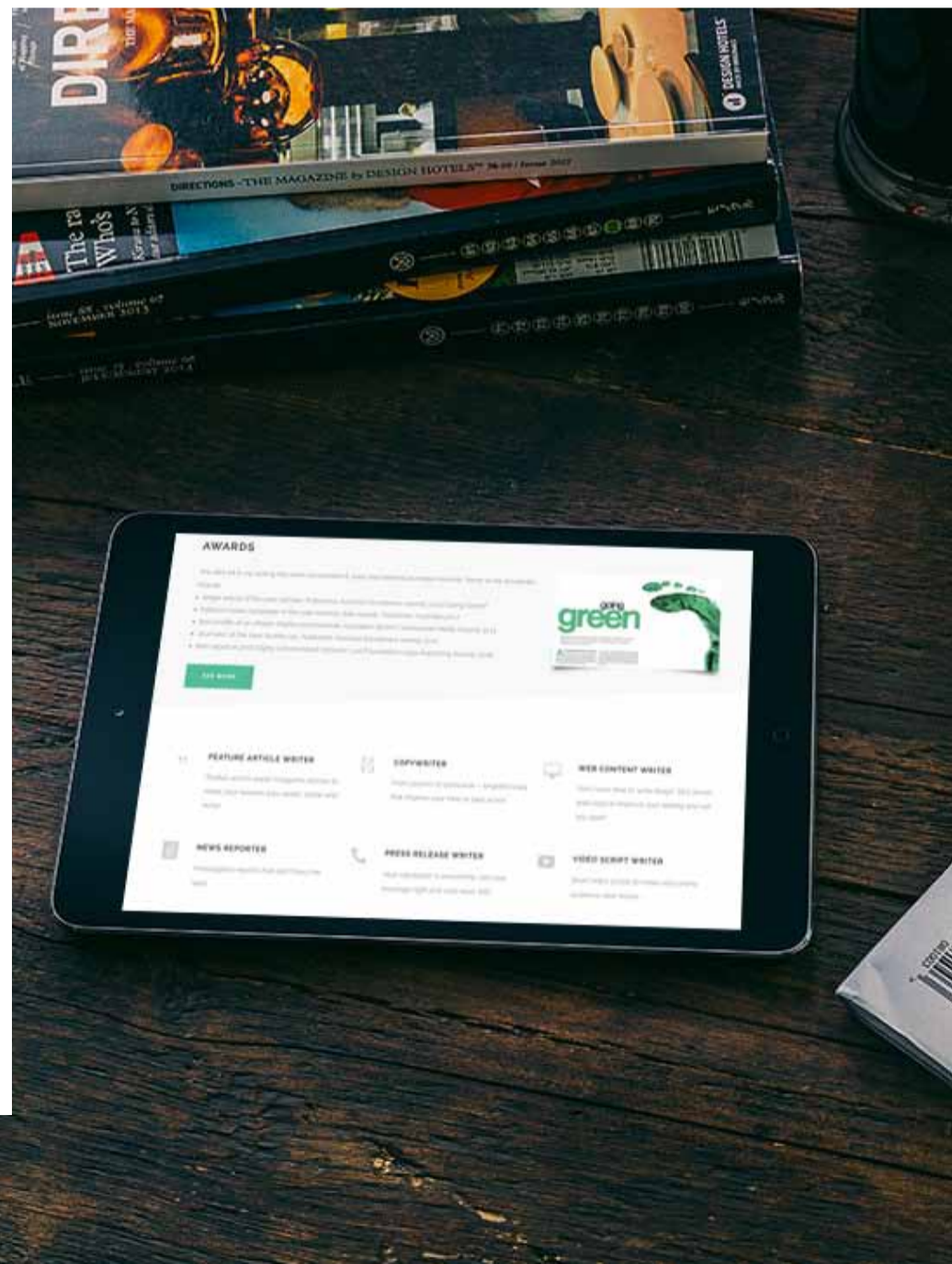
If you say. “We want to target *everyone!*” then you’re going to be disappointed because it’s simply not possible to target everybody. Why? Because it’s *impossible* to write a targeted piece of web copy which appeals to all target markets.

You are better off choosing one market and offering them something relevant and interesting, rather than choosing many targets and offering them a bland, across-the-board offer that is neither interesting nor relevant.

You may have numerous target markets. That’s okay. You need to treat each one differently and target them with different messages. It’s possible you’ll need a separate page for each different target market. Your copywriter will be able to help you with this.

“So, how do you work out which target market to focus on?”

The answer is simple – choose the target market that is most lucrative to you or who has the most potential to be lucrative.”



On some occasions, you may get away with targeting a few different groups with the one piece of copy. But in general, I advocate against targeting disparate groups – it’s just a waste of money. What would you rather have? 50 per cent of a particular target market or 0 per cent of every target market.

Deciding on a niche is one of the most important decisions you’ll make when it comes to creating your website.

Creating The Features And Benefits List

This is the second most important section in the Brief. People buy from you because they have a need. They buy benefits.

“However, most businesses promote features, which is the worst thing you can do. It bores people to death and does not tell them ‘what’s in it for them’, which is the number one rule for writing great copy.”

For example, let’s say you sell leather boots. What’s good about having leather? Well, **Feature # 1** They last longer. That’s nice but what’s *really* good about that is it will take longer for the boots to wear out so I can save money by not having to replace them.

Feature # 2 They are water proof, which means that my feet don’t get damp or wet if walking in the rain. Again, that’s nice, but what’s *really* good about that is my feet stay dry, which means I stay comfortable and good humoured!

Check out the listing below to find out the top 10 reasons people buy. See if you can match what you offer to one of the reasons in this list. Knowing this will make writing your copy that little bit easier. People buy for a few main reasons – here are the top 10.

Top 10 Reasons Why People Buy

1. Save Time
2. Save Money
3. Make Money or Prevent Losing Money
4. Avoid Effort
5. To Attract Others
6. Be In Style
7. Protect The Family
8. Gain Praise/Recognition
9. To Be Unique
10. To Feel Good About Themselves - Altruism



To help address the reasons why people buy from you, your copywriter needs to identify all of the Features and Benefits of your product or service.

There could be dozens of features. It's the copywriter's job to find as many features of the product as possible. Not every feature and benefit will end up in the final copy, but you need to work out what they are before you discard them.

I then need to convert that feature into a benefit. (Remember, people buy benefits, not features).

To deduce what the benefit is, you simply insert the words '**which means that**' after the Feature.

For example, I've taken three hypothetical features about a Victorian tour and created benefits from them. To highlight the principle behind this process, I have bolded the three words **which means that** so you can see how it converts a feature into a benefit.

How To Sell Your Benefits

Feature #1:

1800 toll-free number

Benefit #1:

You get a Free Call, **which means that** you don't have to pay anything to contact us, **which means that** you can spend your money on other fun things like food, booze and entertainment.

And you don't have to mess around with strange foreign coins in a phone box trying to work out how much it costs to make a local phone call.

Feature #2:

It costs \$70.

Benefit #2:

This tour is good value because you get a barbeque, free wine-tasting, tea and biscuits included as part of the fee, **which means that** you don't have to spend any more money on food

during the day. It also **means that** you don't have to worry about packing lunch or preparing anything as we provide it all.

Feature #3:

Free wine

Benefit #3:

You don't have to bring any alcohol with you, **which means that** you save money, and you get to taste some great Australian wines. This creates a relaxing environment, **which means that** it helps you meet other people, share stories, find new friends and new travel mates.

This process gets us one step closer to creating great copy.

Your copywriter will help you extract as many features and benefits from the copy as possible.



Top 10 Questions To Ask A Copywriter

There are lots of copywriters out there so be careful who you choose. Don't use price as the gauge because, like anything, if you pay peanuts you get monkeys. Your website is too important to leave in the hands of an inexperienced writer so it pays to do some due diligence before you choose your copywriter:

Here are a few questions and tips to keep in mind when interviewing your copywriter:

1. Has your copywriter been trained?

Training is important but most copywriters are self-taught and do not have an external measuring tool to establish what will work and what won't. Ask them where they did their training and how long they have been working as a writer.

2. Ask to see some of their previous work.

A strong portfolio is a good indication that they have experience in web writing and know what they are doing.

3. Do they ask to have a briefing meeting with you?

Some copywriters go off half-cocked and start writing without even asking for a briefing meeting. This is a sure sign they do not know what they are doing. Yes, a briefing takes time but like a house or building, all great things are built on a strong foundation – the Creative Brief is that foundation.

4. Do they ask you what the website needs to achieve?

Copywriters need to be good marketers and good marketers always start with the end in mind i.e. what do you want to achieve? If a copywriter doesn't ask that of your website, how they can possibly write copy that achieves your objective?

5. Does your copywriter just take notes or do they challenge your assumptions and assertions?

No-one likes to be questioned, but all great copywriters will ask the basic questions that often get overlooked – the very questions that often turn a business on its head. Good copywriters ask a lot of questions and help business owners find the answers.

6. Does your copywriter provide more than one round of revisions?

Getting copy right the first time is hard so it's important your copywriter includes at least one, or even better, two rounds of revisions with their quote. There's nothing worse than paying a copywriter extra fees to do revisions when their first draft didn't even meet the brief.

7. Does your copywriter give you a fixed quote?

Quoting a copywriting job can be very difficult because it's not clear at the outset how much work is involved. However, that's the nature of the beast and good copywriters are skilled at estimating how much time is involved

and should be able to provide a fixed quote that won't change unless the brief changes.

8. Does your copywriter give you a concrete deadline as to when they will deliver their first draft?

Getting copy on time is critical because it holds everything up if it's not ready and that means lost business for you.

9. Has your copywriter worked with web developers before?

Having a copywriter that speaks the same language as web developers is very helpful in getting a website up and running. There is a lot of

technical knowledge required to build a website and although copywriters are not IT gurus, it helps if your copywriter knows what meta tags, titles, descriptions, forms etc are because it means everyone is on the same page, which ultimately saves you time and money.

10. Does your copywriter offer SEO copywriting?

Writing copy that helps a site get found on Google is vital for the success of your business, so it's worth asking your copywriter if they have this skill. You will pay extra to get this service, but it's well worth it if getting on page one of Google is important to you.

How To Find A Great Copywriter

My site has more information on how compelling content can help grow your business and readership, plus a comprehensive portfolio of my print and digital writing: www.harrietedmund.com.au.

If I can be of service to you. Please contact me at:



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