

Writing words that work

Copywriting tips for publicity and promotions

Most publicity and promotions rely on words to put a message across. Some, such as large billboard posters may rely on images, but even if a picture does paint a thousand words, if you don't have a few well chosen ones with the image, you won't always get the results you want! This briefing sheet looks at how to put words together to interest and involve your target audiences (the groups of people you want to attract) in your activities. It will look at tried and tested methods for making sure your direct mail letters, advertising, leaflets and posters achieve the results you want.

Before you put pen to paper...

- Find out how much space you have for your writing. If you only have space in a box ad for ten words there's no point labouring over a paragraph or two. If you look at a similar ad or brochure or leaflet you can work out how many words you have to play with.
- Decide what you want to achieve. Are you selling tickets for a performance, finding new members to join your organisation, inviting people to attend an introductory talk or demonstration of your activities? You may be doing several of these things, but what is the most important? Sort out your priorities before you begin to write or you will get muddled and the reader will get confused.

- What will happen to your leaflet or other publicity material? Are you going to post it? Put it through letter boxes? Display it? Do people have to pick it up? This will have an effect how much you write and how you write because people will read your material in different ways.
- Look at other people's leaflets, posters, letters or whatever you are planning.
- What do you like? What makes you want to buy or attend what is being offered? Are there any colours or designs that are striking? You can learn a lot simply by seeing what other people have done and even if the ones you like are full colour on glossy paper, you may still be able to use the ideas in a more affordable way.
- Don't worry too much about it! Relax and enjoy yourself, have fun with the problem: words aren't set in stone, you can rub them out if you don't like them and have another go.

Whatever you are writing you will need to:

- **Know who you are writing for**
Try to imagine a typical user of your service, or typical member of the audience. What are they like? What do they find interesting, value, appreciate? Keep them in mind and write for them.
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- **Use simple language, short sentences and no jargon**
People haven't got time to wade through flowery prose, littered with long words and complicated phrases. Write like you speak: simply and directly. Look at newspapers like the Daily Mail and make your writing style as simple and easy for the reader to understand.
- **Tell your readers about the benefits you offer, not just the features of your service or activity**
Don't assume people will realise the benefits of your offer just by reading what you are offering: spell it out for them. For example, not "Join the Northtown handbell ringers and learn to play with your local group", but "Join the Northtown handbell ringers and enjoy learning to play in a relaxed and friendly atmosphere".
- **Have all the facts**
If you don't know all the details of what you are offering, your readers won't stand a chance! Collect all the facts, find out more than you can use: it is better to have more information than too little to draw on. Knowing what you are talking about will give your writing authority and inspire confidence in your reader.
- **Use interesting images and ideas, not worn clichés**
Well worn phrases turn your reader off and you will lose their attention. If you've heard the phrase before, so have they. Try and use words in unusual and arresting combinations and use images to convey the atmosphere or feel of your event or group.
- **Tell your reader what they need to know**

Make sure they know what is being offered, where and when, how your reader will benefit and what they have to do to take up your offer. Have a check list of all the essential information you need to include and cross off the items as you write them in. Write to interest the reader in what you are doing, give them the information they need and leave it at that, don't write any more or any less.

Two tips to improve your writing style

1. **Read what you write aloud.**
You may feel stupid, but you will quickly learn what works and what doesn't. If you need to pause for breath, your sentences are too long. If you need to re-read something, it means it isn't clear. If it sounds pompous, it probably is. Reading your words aloud makes sure your writing is crisp and clear.
2. **Write your first draft then go and do something else.**
Leave what you write alone overnight if you can, then read it fresh in the morning. You will surprise yourself with your critical ability, find it easy to spot mistakes and jumbled thinking and will probably be able to put it all right quickly and easily.

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Direct mail

Do you send out letters to your members asking them to renew their membership? Do you send people on your mailing list details of forthcoming shows and events?

This is called direct mail and if you get it right, it can be one of the most effective ways of marketing your activities. Because direct mail is so effective it is used by many organisations and companies to market their products or services. All the tactics on the list below **WORK** and if you use them, they will work for you as well.

1. **Always send a letter.** Even if you are only sending a leaflet with your performance dates on and a booking form, send a letter as well. In the letter tell the reader what benefits you are offering them. Spell them out. If possible, personalise the letter.
2. **Use the envelope to reinforce your message.** Get envelopes printed with a brief, positive, sales message.

For example:

"Fun activities for you and your children this summer", or "Free theatre tickets! Details inside".

And if you can't afford to print your envelopes, write your message on the envelopes with a red pen!

3. **Include an incentive.** This could be a separate leaflet with a special offer, such as "Book now and enjoy a 20 per cent discount", or "Book for three concerts and receive two tickets for our gala evening free!". Or this could be a voucher for a free

glass of wine at one of your performances or events. Make sure you give people a good reason to return their bookings to you early.

4. **Use your letter to talk to your customers.** Your letter is the most important part of your mailing because it gives you a very personal way of communicating with your customers. Use the word **YOU**, tell your reader what they will gain from taking part in your activity.
5. In your letter you should attract the reader's attention, hold their interest, stimulate their desire for your activity or service and then demand action.

This is the useful formula AIDA:

Attention – Interest – Desire - Action

Use it to guide you as you write the letter.

6. Use a PS. Write your PS to reinforce the major benefit you are offering, or to encourage your reader to reply early.

Advertisements

If you use advertising it can be very expensive, so be sure to maximise its impact.

Use the magazines and newspapers your target audiences read

If you don't know what they read you could ask them in a survey, or you can ask the advertising departments of the magazines and newspapers who their readerships are to see if they match with the kind of people that come to your events or take part in your activities.

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Decide what you are selling.

Exactly what do you want people to do after they read your ad? Setting your priorities will help you write crisply, concisely to achieve the results you want.

Use your logo.

Especially in classified ads, your logo will set you apart from the rest of the column and if you use it over and over again, readers will recognise it and think your group very lively for always putting on events!

Offer benefits.

Again, this is one of the most important tips for success. If you are offering a discount, or if this is a special event, or if there is a free crèche, say so boldly so that people don't miss it. Be clear, concise and fresh.

Don't use clichés.

Say what you want to say simply, directly and give it a twist by all means but don't confuse the reader!

Be creative.

You need to grab attention as you are competing with hundreds of other ads.

KISS!

This stands for 'Keep it simple, stupid' which is a good rule of thumb for all your advertising.

Does it stand out?

Once you have chosen your words, measure out the exact space you have bought in the paper and fit your words into that space. Then paste it onto the page of the newspaper it will be printed in.

Can you read the headline clearly? A good idea is to squint at it through half closed eyes and if you can still read the headline it's OK.

Posters and leaflets

Before you get going on printing your 500 posters, ask yourself how you are going to distribute them.

Posters

Posters will only sell your event if they can be seen by lots of people, so they won't do you any good left in their box! Distribution is time-consuming and you need to identify where you will put your posters up and who will put them up. Sort all this out before you print the poster itself, to make sure you spend your money well. Most of the tips for successful ads apply to posters. Keep the writing to a minimum, because people won't read it if it is long. Be sure to include all the essential information on the poster, such as the date and place of the event and the telephone number for bookings.

KISS: Keep it simple, stupid!

Use an eye-catching design, this will probably mean using a designer and if you do, tell them where your poster will be displayed and remind them it will be viewed at a distance.

Leaflets

Leaflets are wonderful opportunities for creating enthusiasm about the activities and events you offer. They offer you the chance to say more than you can in an advertisement or on a poster and you can combine your words with a striking design to attract the attention of your reader and reinforce your message.

A simple formula for leaflets is:

Tell them what you're going to tell them.
Tell them.
Tell them what you've told them.

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This means the front page of your leaflet is a headline, telling them what you are going to tell them, the inside carries the full story and then on the back page you repeat the main points again. Your headline should be short and simple, easy to read and communicate your main idea. Inside you have plenty of scope for telling your story but make sure it is easy to read. Break up long paragraphs, using headings and subheadings, make sure there is plenty of white space around your copy and make sure it is interesting to read.

On the back cover, which is likely to be above a booking form if this is appropriate, summarise the main benefits you have already told your reader about. You could use a short letter, or give a series of quotations from satisfied customers or members that put into their words the benefits you have identified.

The booking form

If you are including a booking form make sure it is really easy to use and gives you all the information you need. Collect other people's and have a look at how they have done it. Ask a friend to fill in your prototype booking form to find out how easy it is or not.

Make it easy: you don't want to give your reader any excuse not to book.

A final word on proof reading

Once you've written your sparkling copy you must proof read it. This means going through your work and checking for typographical mistakes, spelling mistakes, punctuation and grammar. You should also check your work for consistency, to make sure, for example, you use the same form of address for people

throughout your writing. There are many books on English usage that are helpful to distinguish between troublesome words, such as practise and practice, and give you help with grammar. Proof reading is different from reading something for information or pleasure. You need to look at each word and check it is correct, this sounds easy but we tend to skim words as we gain understanding of the text. There are several things you can do to help you concentrate and pick up any mistakes.

Use a ruler

If you read using a ruler under the text your eye does not jump around so much and you are better able to concentrate on each word as you read.

Get a helper

Read your final text to a helper who checks the type as you read it. You will discover mistakes in meaning, grammar and your checker will spot spelling mistakes and typos easily.

Read your text backwards!

You don't have to do this out loud, but if you read the text backwards you are forced to read it word by word and as you do this you will pick up any mistakes.

Get someone else to do it

Pay them if you have to, but having a fresh pair of eyes looking at your document will pay dividends. You will probably have become so familiar with the text - you wrote it after all - you may be completely blind to your own mistakes. Someone else will pick them up much more easily.

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Be sure to check:

- Telephone numbers
- Proper names
- Addresses
- Opening times
- Dates
- Prices

Putting it all in context

A marketing plan

Your publicity and promotion activities should be part of your wider marketing plan, setting out your all your marketing activities as well as your budget, your aims and the time scale you are working to.

Key marketing activities include:

Research: what do your users want? value? find problematic? Research finds out the answers to questions like these.

People: find out who is most likely to use / visit / participate / attend your activities. These are your target groups.

Product: what do your users think is special about you and your service or activities? What are the features of your service or activities? What are the benefits of these features and how do your benefits match your different target groups?

Customer service: are you giving your users what they want?

What is the best way to communicate with your users:

on the telephone, face to face, by letter? How do you respond to your customers, can you make all your interactions with them positive?

Pricing: how much do you charge for membership, activities, tickets, etc? Do they reflect the quality of your organisation, but manage to be affordable?

Publicity and promotion: there are many tools you can use to create publicity and promote your organisation and its activities.

For example:

letters, newsletters, press releases, questionnaires, competitions, exhibitions, leaflets, posters, advertising, brochures, meetings, telephone calls, face to face contact and many more.

When you put all your marketing activities together with a budget for what you are going to do and a time line, then you have a marketing plan.

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Other Related Information Sheets

Planning a Marketing Campaign
How to Write a Press Release
Creating Clear Print (DDA)

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