



Writing Tips for Small Business Owners

**Write promotional materials
to BUILD customer relationships
and
GENERATE sales!**

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Introduction:

This e-book is intended to provide guidance on how to write effectively for your small business. It contains a series of 4 articles that touch on writing catalog and web product descriptions, sales letters and promotional materials to generate sales for your small business. You will learn how to write in a clear, conversational tone and the difference between product features and benefits. Most importantly, the articles touch on “knowing who your customer is” and building long-term customer relationships based on credible writing techniques.

Many thanks to Becky McCray for publishing this 4 article series on Small Biz Survival.

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About the Author

Article 1

Write to Generate Sales

Whether your small business is located in the Smoky Mountains, the plains of Nebraska, or a coastal Oregon burg, all business owners have one goal in common...to **sell** their product or service. So, what is one of the best ways to get customers to take notice of your products? You're looking at it...the power of words. Fresh, sales-driven writing grabs and holds a customer's attention. It makes them say, "I gotta have that" and keeps them coming back again and again to your product offerings.

You can use the writing techniques I will be introducing in more places that you imagined. Every time you sit down to create a sales letter to promote your business or introduce a new product line, you will have the need for persuasive, sales-oriented writing. Your website presents an immediate first impression and has the tremendous power to retain customers if your writing is tight, clear and fresh. Catalog descriptions, direct mail pieces, email promotions, ads and flyers **sell** product – write to create a strong bottom line!

Know who your customer is

Before you begin writing *extraordinary* marketing materials, flyers or catalog product descriptions, get to know who your customer is. As simple as this seems, it is important to have a good understanding of your basic customer profile. Things like age group, demographics, income, interests and hobbies all play into who you are writing for. This allows you to get a good picture of your typical customer so you can better serve their needs. Most of us know who our local customers are, but if you have internet sales – you will have nationwide and even global customers. It pays to know your entire customer base.

Just as importantly, listen to what customers have to say. They can offer valuable insight into your product offerings, merchandise they would like to see offered or suggestions for improvement. Most customers are more than happy to offer feedback because you have acknowledged them as vital to your business.

As easy as talking to a neighbor

Now that you have established who your customer is, let's talk about the style of writing. The trend is to keep your writing (also known as copy) conversational and informal. This means:

- build rapport with your customers and keep your writing understandable for EVERYONE. Don't make customers drag out the dictionary. Unless you are targeting a very specific customer niche, you stand to lose a broader customer base.

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- keep hype to a minimum. No one likes to feel he or she is being “sold.”
- create accurate, trustworthy copy. Not only does writing “honest” copy keep you out of hot water with your customers, it builds customer loyalty.
- be passionate about your business and products. It is infectious!

Writing so everyone can understand your copy keeps potential customers from tossing your promotion or catalog in the trash out of frustration. So keep it simple, friendly, engaging and conversational.

Appeal to the Senses

To create this engaging, conversational copy, appeal to your customer’s senses. When a customer receives your catalog in the mail or are viewing products on your website, they don’t have the luxury of handling the merchandise. They can’t taste your award winning cinnamon rolls or hear your harbor wind chimes.

To sell product, your words must be the eyes, ears, nose, hands and taste buds for potential customers. The following fruitcake example lets your customer see, smell and taste the cake through description:

Simply Sinful Fruitcake

Bite sized pieces of luscious fruit cake smothered in creamy milk chocolate is an alluring temptation around the holidays or any occasion. Not to be confused with your plain jane fruit cake, this cake is loaded with cherries, candied pineapple, walnuts, pecans and raisins. Add 100 proof bourbon, premium dark rum and 84 proof brandy to this mixture and you have a treat no one can resist!

By engaging a customer’s senses, you create a fruitcake description that a customer can literally taste and see. Bite sized portions, smothered in creamy milk chocolate and loaded with cherries...provide a mouth-watering description to let the customer experience the product as if they were in your bakery.

This first article lays a beginning foundation for creating sales-generating copy. Know your customer, keep the writing conversational and appeal to their senses. The next article will focus on product benefits. Today’s copy must do more than list product features; it must let the customer picture a better life!

Article 2

Write to “Benefit” Your Customer

If you can answer this one question in your sales materials, “How will this product make my customer’s life better?” you have a formula for a successful promotion. Whether your product is hardware supplies, medical supplies, quilts or rustic furniture, focus on how the merchandise fulfills a need or solves a problem for your customer. In this 2nd part of my four part series on writing for your small business, I will be concentrating on writing copy jam-packed with product benefits! The focus of this article will be writing descriptions for your print catalog or website products.

Remember, you are writing to *sell* product! Great copy is just another tool you can use to run a successful, *profitable* business. Copy that successfully combines a product’s **features** with customer **benefits** makes the sale. So let’s take a closer look at these two components - features and benefits. Both are necessary for a copy description that generates sales.

First, what exactly is a product feature? Features provide the description and specifications of an item. You can find a product’s features in the instructions or user guide that come with the product. Some examples of typical features would be:

- ✓ product material (stainless steel, cotton, plastic, etc)
- ✓ product function (tells time, toasts bread, slices meat, etc)
- ✓ size and dimension
- ✓ colors available
- ✓ # of pieces
- ✓ Price

Next, look at the second component - benefits. Incorporating benefits, not just features, into your copy descriptions, promote the **desire** to purchase product. They make an appeal to the customer and fulfill a need. Benefits show your customer what he stands to *gain* by purchasing your product. Benefits answer questions such as:

- ✓ Will this product make life easier or provide a convenience?
- ✓ Does the product solve a problem?
- ✓ Will the product save time or money?
- ✓ Does this product alleviate a fear?
- ✓ Does the product flatter?
- ✓ Is the product exclusive?

Below, is a description a medical supplier might use for one of his products. This supplier’s customer base would be hospitals, clinics and doctors, so the writing

must focus on this particular clientele's needs. This example is for a skin stapler often used after surgery.

Skin Stapler 35W Sterile:

Shorten surgery time and get consistent, professional results with this welcome companion. An alternative to stitches, this compact design holds a generous 35 staples and fits comfortably in the palm of your hand for maximum control. With no need to disinfect, stapler provides a sterile and affordable option for every medical professional. \$19.99

Having just discussed the need for features and benefits in your writing, let's dissect this sample and list the product's features first. They would be:

- Stapler
- Holds 35 staples
- Sterile
- \$19.99

Would the above features alone sell this particular product? Most likely, they wouldn't. You want to take the basic features of the product and turn them into a product your customer can't live without. If a product solves a problem or makes life easier for your customer, you are more likely to make the sale. Here I have listed the features again and how that feature benefits the customer.

- Stapler = shorter surgery time, professional results, alternative to stitches
- Holds 35 staples = compact for comfortable use, ease of control, fits in palm
- Sterile = No need for disinfecting
- \$19.99 = affordable, saves money.

Also, note that the introductory sentence in your writing should be the most important. Customers tend to skim copy so the introductory sentence should draw them in immediately *and* with your most important **benefit**.

Lastly, but one of the most important things to do with your writing when you are through is to *Retire* and *Revise*. When you have finished writing several descriptions for the day, retire the writing and come back to it in a day or two. Then...read it aloud. You will be amazed at the awkward sentences you stumble over or sentences that need to be clarified. Look for typos, revise and make sure the description reads smoothly and clearly.

Article 3

Write with a Clear Message

This is the 3rd article in a series of four to help small and rural businesses write sales-generating web content, product descriptions, sales letters and more. In Write to “Benefit” Your Customer, we touched on creating catalog and web product descriptions that promote the *desire* to purchase your company’s products. Now, we will fine tune a little more and touch on writing clear, tight copy so that every word works toward building customer confidence, appealing to customer emotions, creating a strong call to action, and ultimately making the sale.

Don’t make Customers Read Sentences Twice....

because they won’t! To begin writing clear copy your customers must get the meaning of your message the first time. If you have long, rambling sentences, they tend to complicate your promotion and your catalog or sales letter may end up in the trash. Break into smaller sentences to make your message much more palatable and keep your customers reading. Long, rambling sentences seldom come to the point and leave customers confused.

Especially with web or catalog product descriptions – every word must count. Catalog space is typically limited and too many neutral words or phrases such as:

- with this...
- there is...
- these are just a few...
- you’ll be sure...

add no value to content and waste space. With online users, you typically have just a few seconds to grab a potential customer’s attention, so make sure you don’t waste their time with content that adds nothing to the product’s description. Remember their finger is on the mouse and losing a potential customer is just a click away.

With the compliments and permission of Sturbridge Yankee Workshop, I’ve picked a product description I wrote for them to highlight an example of tight copy. As you read the description, pay attention to what other unique factors are in play with this particular piece of writing.

Americana Patchwork Throw – ©Sturbridge Yankee Workshop - 2008
Bundle up in the glory and heritage of early Americana. Patches of firecracker reds, linen whites and sparkling sea blues bring a nostalgic, warm touch to décor. Made of 100% tufted cotton, this throw is the perfect lightweight solution for

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summer and autumn evenings. Place across the foot of the bed or drape over the sofa arm for a cozy warmth when you need it. 50"x 60".

Besides the tight and clear description, did you catch some of the subtle *and not so subtle* attributes of this description?

- Right off the bat, the copy begins with a verb – action is noted immediately. You want to move the customer from a passive state to an active state. Here, the customer envisions himself/herself – bundling up in this throw.
- This copy also has emotional appeal to your customer– pride in American heritage and sense of patriotism. This product makes a customer feel good about the purchase.
- Benefits of the product are also noted and key to a successful description. In this example, uses for this throw are suggested: lightweight *solution* for summer and autumn evenings, place at the foot of the bed... Let your customer know how your product is of value to them.

This description not only makes every word count, it appeals to an emotional hot button and has the customer envisioning himself or herself using the product. In 65 short words, this description covers a lot of territory! Questions about the product itself are answered and it engages the customer with clear benefits.

The last article will focus on sales letters and promotional materials for marketing purposes. We'll talk about building credibility, distinguishing yourself from the competitor and a basic formula for a successful promotion.

Article 4

6 Tips for Writing Dynamic Sales Letters

This is the last article in a series of four to help small and rural businesses write sales-generating web content, product descriptions, sales letters and more. In *Write with a Clear Message*, I discussed writing your promotional materials in a clear, understandable voice. This article will touch on creating that all-important sales letter...or any company correspondence for that matter. We will discuss presenting yourself in a professional...yet approachable manner.

Start with Three Simple Words

I want to start by mentioning a recent post on Small Biz Survival – titled “the difference it makes.” The author states 3 very important words at the end of his post – *just be helpful*. Those three words are just as important to remember when writing sales letters or promotions as they are in face-to-face meetings. Your sales letters, ads and brochures don’t just promote products and services, but build customer relationships, credibility and trust. Sales materials should be informative and provide value to the customer. The hard sales line in your written correspondence rarely gets you anywhere.

With that said...let’s get down to some of the mechanics and basics of writing your promotional materials. This list should give you a great start to creating a dynamic letter or promotion.

- **You are introducing yourself and your business.** In your business correspondence, you are representing yourself, your business and your product line. Be sure that in all written communication, and that includes emails, that you provide **complete** contact information. At minimum, provide company name, address and phone # on correspondence. Your business title is also a great thing to add. Customers love to know that they are hearing directly from the business owner, the operations manager, etc.
- **Distinguish yourself.** What makes you different from your competitors? Do you provide emergency 24 hour plumbing services, is your product made exclusively in your area, is your shipping free, does your product benefit a particular customer base? Put some thought into what makes you or your product unique and be sure to state it in your materials.
- **Keep paragraphs 3 to 5 sentences.** Long, daunting paragraphs tend to be skipped over (or skimmed at best). Make it easier for your reader by providing frequent breaks in the writing.

- **Use Subheads to keep customers reading**
“Start with Three Simple Words” is an example of a subhead and is used between the 1st and 2nd paragraph in this article. Subheads break up paragraphs and give the customer a glimpse of what is to come. Your subhead should catch your reader’s attention and prompt them to continue reading. The curiosity of what the three words could be keeps a reader engaged.
- **Provide credibility.** If you have a great customer testimonial on a product you sell, by all means, use it in your promotional materials. If you market vitamin supplements and have access to clinical reports, site your sources. Providing proof and credibility in promotional materials promotes trust in the product. Just make sure your testimonials, reports, etc are all legitimate... and don’t go overboard – it can destroy believability.
- **Clearly state your “Call to Action.”** When you make your close, clearly state what you are offering your customer and how to place a hassle-free order.
 - Let them know exactly what they are getting
 - Be clear on pricing
 - How to order and if there is a time limit to order
 - If there is a money back guarantee or return policy

Follow these tips and remember to be professional, yet approachable in your writing style. Make your sales materials informative and easy to understand. Today’s consumer is typically busy and has precious little time to spare. Also, don’t approach customers with a hard-hitting, exaggerated sales pitch; you’ll lose the sale and a potential loyal customer. Long-standing relationships with customers are built over time.

About the Author:



Denise McGill is a freelance business writer living in Naples, ID that creates persuasive, sales-driven copy at reasonable rates. With a focus on product *benefits*, she creates robust copy that builds long-term customer relationships AND generates sales!

Her writing career began with a piece of poetry published in a small press literary magazine in 1992. Since then, she has gone on to become a versatile writer specializing in catalog/retail product description, copy makeovers, landing pages, promotional materials, sales letters, articles and more. Denise has written product descriptions and web content for companies such as Collections, Etc, Sturbridge Yankee Workshop and NetShops, Inc.

Her articles have been published in numerous online newsletters such as Small Biz Survival and Catalog Success. She also enjoys helping small business owners write sales letters and promotional materials to get their businesses off the ground.

Denise has a free monthly email newsletter, Copywriter's Cupboard. She shares writing and marketing tips for business owners and copywriters alike. So take a moment to subscribe to her online newsletter at <http://mcgillcopywriting.com> to receive more writing tips and hints.

You can find this “free” e-book at her website – http://mcgillcopywriting.com/e-book_products along with her new feature e-book release, *Bring Catalog and Web Product Descriptions to Life*.

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