

4 KEYS TO BETTER WRITING

Writing seems to come so naturally to some people, while others struggle to get that first sentence on the page. But like any skill, good writing can be learned. Marketing writing is especially challenging because you're not just communicating—you're educating, persuading or selling.

Further, different situations and formats demand different styles of writing. Emails should be straightforward and concise with short paragraphs. Brochures can be more conversational and detailed. Website content must be written in small pieces with subheads and bullets that are easy to scan and summarize. Blogs are often more informal and simply written.

Good writing isn't just correct, it's effective—it gets the job done. And that's a lot harder than just writing correctly. Effective writing is clear, concise and compelling. It takes thought, planning, strategy and a little style.

No matter what kind of marketing communication piece you're writing, knowing and applying these four keys will help you focus on what works. And speaking of focus...

Key 1 – Focus on your audience.

Present information and ideas in a way that your intended listeners will understand and appreciate. Ask yourself these questions to determine how you'll address the audience's interests, needs, and backgrounds.

- What are their positions?
- What are their personal preferences?
- What demographic characteristics are significant?
- What firmographics are important?
- What do they already know about the company, product or service?
- What is their attitude toward the company, product or service?

Key 2 – Talk about benefits, not features.

A feature is a descriptive fact or characteristic of your product or service—usually a characteristic of a product or an aspect of a service being offered. It answers the question, "What does it have/offer?"

- Bluetooth capabilities in your car is a feature.
- Same-day delivery is a feature offered by a company.

A benefit is what the user of the product or service gets from a feature. It answers, "What's in it for me?"

- Talking on the phone hands-free with an ear piece or while driving is a benefit.
- The time and money you save on labor with same-day delivery is a benefit.

It's not enough to list all the qualities or characteristics of your product or service; you have to tell the reader what those qualities or characteristics will do for them.

Key 3 – Use “You view”

Maya Angelou once said, "I think we all have empathy. We may not have enough courage to display it." It's easy and safe to write marketing pieces that extoll the virtues of your company and products, brag about your company history, and include trite phrases about how important customers are to you.

You view is about being brave enough to show empathy by focusing on the reader.

- Not this: “We have more than 100 options!”
- But this: “With 100 options to choose from, you’re sure to find what you need!”

It’s about using “you” and “your” not “we” and “us.”

- Not this: “We offer quick, friendly and reliable service.”
- But this: “You need the right products when and where you want them. And you should get it with a smile.”

Key 4 – Use proper grammar, spelling, punctuation, etc.

Be sure to fact-check, spell check, grammar check...because one small error, especially in a customer's personal or business name, will stick out like a sore thumb to your reader.

Even if you think you know how to spell a city name, last name, company name, or even a phrase, look it up. It takes only seconds and it may save you from personal embarrassment or the ire of an unhappy client or customer. Need a few more reasons?

- Bad grammar, spelling, punctuation and other errors make you look uneducated, unprofessional or lazy.
- Bad grammar, etc. hurts your credibility.
- Bad grammar, etc. not only reflects poorly on you, it reflects poorly on your entire organization.

Want to learn more?

How to Get Better At Grammar, Spelling, Punctuation, etc.

- Look it up! Most people have a smartphone, laptop, computer or other digital device. Use it!
- Buy good reference books like the Associated Press Stylebook and other reference manual.
- Take a writing class at a community college or online; or buy a book with lessons and prompts.
- Attend a writing workshop or webinar.
- Hire a writing coach (ahem, me) who can work with you on your specific problem areas.