

What does a copywriter do anyway?

 By [Tiffany Markman](#)

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I'm asked this question a lot. Usually after I explain that, "No, the copywriter isn't the person who puts the little 'c' into the circle. That's copyright." I'm also often asked the difference between copywriters and editors.

So, in case you've ever wondered what we do, or [whether you need one of us to assist you](#), here's some insight for you:

1. We write advertising and marketing copy

Sometimes it's the sexy stuff - the stuff that wins Loeries and makes the public laugh. Sometimes it's the simple stuff - the stuff that every organisation, no matter what it does, needs to attract customers and clients.

Copywriters handle a variety of printed materials, such as adverts (in different formats), brochures, catalogs, circulars, direct mail, flyers, product literature, sales letters, self-mailers, and show displays.

2. We write online copy ("web"/"SEO copy")

Most of the copy on the web is awful. It's either reader-unfriendly or Google-unfriendly, and both are bad for business. So certain copywriters specialise in writing for email marketing, websites, online sales pages, auto-responder messages, banner ads, product descriptions, video and podcast scripts, etc.

"SEO copy" (which is optimised for search engines) is a sub-category of this, and a specialised area.

3. We edit ("copy edit") what other people write

We're not just writers. Sometimes we polish, repurpose or fix the copy written by others. Copy editing includes proof-reading and is also referred to as "sub-editing" or "subbing".

This can involve content-editing, fact-checking, research, style and tone repairs and line-by-line proofing for all of the material mentioned above, as well as for general business communications, books and some other areas of publishing.

4. We write audio-visual and broadcast copy

For many, this is considered delicious work. Audio-visual material is used for training, recruiting, fundraising and teaching by a wide range of businesses, government bodies and industry organisations, so copywriters often work on audio scripts, radio ads, TV ads and video scripts. A solid understanding of the format is needed.

5. We write collateral (below-the-line) materials

The above-the-line stuff is the expensive mass-focused stuff, typically used to 'spray and pray'. The below-the-line stuff is the cheaper, more direct, more targeted stuff.

In this area, copywriters write and edit copy for annual reports, booklets, corporate brochures, letters, case histories, corporate profiles, newsletters, and so on.

6. We write, and simplify, technical materials

These are sometimes targeted at technical types and sometimes at the layperson or general public, where readers might need complex ideas translated into simple English.

Clients' requirements can include data sheets, white papers, case studies, reports, sales sheets, technical papers and training and instruction manuals.

7. We collaborate with clients on speeches

And you thought all those crackerjack speech-makers wrote their own stuff! Whatever its main theme (such as 'Address for year-end function' or 'Best man speech for wedding'), any speech must also communicate, motivate, persuade, entertain, educate or sell.

For this reason, certain copywriters work closely with clients - both corporate and individual - on speech creation, and sometimes speech delivery.

A word about niches

Some copywriters (not me) also offer services such as ghostwriting, PR, fundraising writing and translation. Some copywriters specialise in an industry, such as retail banking, while others specialise in a medium, such as radio. Still others specialise in radio writing for retail banking. But most do, or have done, a whole lot of different things.

Copywriters are a diverse bunch, and we love the written word. Your idea of hell (eg deciding where the apostrophe goes, writing a headline or crafting a killer message) is our idea of a fun time. So call on us when you need us. We're at your service.

ABOUT TIFFANY MARKMAN

I spend 10 hours a day writing - and teaching others to write. I was South Africa's Freelance Copywriter of the Year in 2020 and one of the world's 'Top 50 Female Content Marketers' in 2021.

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