The copywriting mistakes most clients make

By [Chemory Gunko](#)

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If you trawl back into the annals of advertising history, what you're going to discover is that the industry was built on copywriting.

In fact, copywriting at the dawn of advertising was so important that all the big names we know were actually copywriters: David Ogilvy, J Walter Thompson, Leo Burnett and more.

Then around the 50s/60s something changed, probably the advent of personal computing and television, and for a long time things got much more visual. Art Directors sprang to the top of the advertising hierarchy... with copywriters in many cases being relegated to the bottom of the importance pile.

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And then came the Internet. One look at the front end of the Internet today will tell you that we're still firmly stuck in a visual world - and from the end users' point of view we probably are.

Here's the kicker though - the technology behind the Internet, how you get indexed, searched for and found, well that relies entirely on coding and words.

Pictures are just there to make it pretty... and they don't mean a cotton-picking thing unless the words you've used have led people to you in the first place.

Websites, SEO, marketing collateral & jargon

I have an ongoing argument that takes place with my daughter, a budding writer, who occasionally uses a word out of context or says it incorrectly. When I correct her, she usually retorts: "Well, that's the way I say it - and I know what I mean!"

As a pioneer and creative, in a way she's right... except the point of language is to communicate with people so that *they* understand what you are trying to convey.

In NeuroLinguistic Programming (NLP), one of the presuppositions is *'the meaning of your communication is the response you get.'*

Basically what this says is, if the person standing in front of you does not understand what you're trying to convey it's because you've made an error in communicating it.

Time and again however, I see clients making this mistake - although in their case it's to use their internal jargon on their marketing collateral and website.

Yes you use those terms every day and you maybe even feel it's important to portray that... but quite honestly, who is really going to do an Internet search for nerds when they're looking for someone to fix their computer or look after their IT needs?

You may have that shiny new catch phrase all buttoned up and you may even be seriously proud that you've found it and launched a whole new word into the English language, but until you've marketed that word to death and it's become mainstream knowledge it really means absolutely nothing.

When the Internet searches your website, SEO is when this makes the biggest difference: what the Internet is searching is stuff like your menu item names, which if your website is built properly will be incorporated into your URLs.

Similarly, most search engines look at the content on your page *and* then tie this up to your page display title *and* metakeywords *and* metadescription *and* URL *and* then look for points of similarity.

If these points of similarity aren't found your SEO will get a poor ranking - and that's why you can't fix this problem by stuffing the mainstream search words into those elements.

Basically what it boils down to is that if you want a page found for a search term, then you have to make it the theme of the entire page, starting with your URL and page display title.

If you really want it to be *effective* then you have to know what people out there are searching for and use exactly those terms.

Not all copywriters are created equal

We've really come full circle with the Internet in terms of the importance of copy versus imagery. Sadly however, people and the industry have not necessarily caught up with that fact.

Just one of the ways you can see this in South Africa is by how many PR agencies don't have dedicated copywriters on staff and expect Account Managers to do all the writing for the client. Likewise many small to medium agencies don't have a copywriter on board at all - or only hire absolute juniors.

The thing is it doesn't matter how pretty your artwork is, once it has the person's attention it needs to feed them relevant and concise information. At a junior level you often don't have the business experience you need to be able to make the content relevant.

You don't know how the product or service ties into business and what it means in people's lives, and the truth is that the majority of marketing that goes on nowadays is aimed at and between businesses. Businesses do business with other businesses.

I've worked with and trained a number of young creatives in my time and have yet to meet a young copywriter that has an understanding of business and a grasp of business English and the terms that make people tick. They all require extensive training and years of experience before they can be left to their own devices.

When you hire juniors and allow juniors to write your content you will get junior results.

So pick your agency by the copywriter - they are the core of all your marketing information and the real idea generators behind the scenes.

The audience of the Internet don't give a damn about your brand

Not what you wanted to hear I know.

You're probably even gunning to retort something back at me, but when last did you actually get to Google and type in a brand name?

Don't you usually just type in the object or service you're looking for most of the time, trusting that companies have marketed themselves and built their websites properly?

Actually, how many brand names do you actually remember? How many parent company names, how many logos can you

recognise? Or do you just remember the particular product you use?

And how many times do you have to do a search on the Internet because you *can't* remember the product or company's name?

Likewise your content - yes the point of marketing to a degree is to educate people about your products and services; but when last did you share a post like that?

In fact, what do you usually share?

If you're most people you're going to say an animal picture, a quote, a picture you liked or something that moved you or touched you personally.

That's what it boils down to... the first point of marketing is to create awareness around your brand and keep building your audience. Once the audience has committed to you then please feel free to educate them.

But give them something exciting if you want them to share it with their friends.

ABOUT CHEMORY GUNKO

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