

Special Report

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WRITING FOR THE WEB

CREATING COPY AND CONTENT THAT
GENERATE MORE TRAFFIC
AND SALES ONLINE

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Section 1

Writing in the Internet Age

A while back I got an e-mail from Matthew Budman, who is the Managing Editor of *Across the Board*—a magazine published by the Conference Board for senior-level executives at large corporations.

Mr. Budman asked me to comment on an article on business writing two authors had submitted for publication in the magazine. The simple premise of the article was that, even in our technological era, writing skills are more important than ever.

I'm not sure why he chose me as someone from whom he wanted commentary on business writing. It may be that I've written a couple of books on business writing including *The Elements of Business Writing* (Alyn & Bacon).

But whatever the reason for my selection, the lead line of the *Across the Board* article (actually the subhead) caught my eye, and generated an immediate and visceral reaction from me.

Here was the reply I gave him:

“Dear Mr. Budman:

“I'd like to believe your article subhead, ‘In an age of technology, writing skills are more important than ever.’ But I'm not convinced.

“My theory is that the Internet has and will continue to diminish the importance of writing skills and the quality of writing over time.

“The reason: Pre-Internet, documents were printed, with considerable expense invested in the design and reproduction.

“Therefore, publishers and other content producers would take pains to ‘get it right.’

“After all, once the piece was printed, correcting a typo, grammatical error, or awkward sentence meant going back to press—again at considerable expense.

“In the Internet era, documents are increasingly electronic files posted on a Website.

“Making corrections is easy, and in fact a whole new category of software—content management systems (CMS)—has evolved to manage these changes.

“Now that content producers realize mistakes are quick, easy, and inexpensive to correct, they are not as concerned with getting it right the first time.

“As a result, they are not as particular about the quality of the writing, editing, and even thinking their organizations publish.

“So it seems to me that, if anything, writing skills are less important in an age of technology, rather than more important.

“Also, the Internet has sped up the pace of business and society. The primary attribute valued today in writing or any other product or service is speed, and it is an attribute to which quality often takes a back seat.”

Does this mean that in direct marketing, copy is no longer king?

No, because direct marketing is the one remaining communications method where good writing *is* more important than ever.

With postage, printing, and list costs continually climbing, and response rates down across the board, it is more difficult than ever to get a strong control in the mail—one generating a good ROI and likely to last a year, two years, or longer.

Worse, our prospects are bombarded by more communications than ever. There are literally millions of Websites they can visit, and over 800 channels of television they can watch. Not to mention all the pop-up ads and spam they receive each day.

With all that information competing for the prospect's attention, you have to work extra hard to make your mailing—whether print or online—stand out and grab the prospect's attention.

And of course that means one thing primarily: strong copy. Though of course, graphics can help.

Lists and offers are tremendously important. But you can identify, fairly quickly and easily, those lists and offers that work best for your product.

Once you've found the right lists and offers, then the only additional leverage you have for boosting response is through—you guessed it—copy.

Ironically, while I believe the Internet may have diminished the importance of most kinds of writing, *our* type of writing—direct response copywriting—has *grown* in importance—not only offline but online as well.

As Nick Usborne points out in his book *Net Words*, “Go to your favorite Website, strip away the glamour of the design and technology, and you're left with words—your last, best way to differentiate yourself online.”

The value society places on writing may be cyclical. When I was a youth in the 1960s, for instance, novels were an important art form as well as a vehicle for social change.

Today we live in a different world. “We do live in a non-book age,” says James Mustich Jr., owner of The Common Reader, a mail order book catalog. “TV, the Internet, and other media now play a much greater role than books in determining the conversation of our culture, so much so that they threaten to overpower and drown out the more contemplative modes of experience, including book reading.”

Perhaps the pendulum will swing the other way again. But one thing is certain: any writing that can generate an ROI for the publisher or marketer who buys the words can command a premium price from the author.

And whether you're online or offline, if you're selling something directly—off the page or off the screen—those words are your copy.

So in direct marketing, copy is still king.

Section 2

Writing Copy for the Web

What you should know about a variety of online freelance assignments

Nothing has been more of a mixed bag for writers than the World Wide Web. On the one hand, the Internet has undergone explosive growth as a marketing and communications channel. This growth has created a huge demand for freelance business writers to write copy for the Web—from Websites and banner ads to ghostwriting e-newsletters and blogs for corporate clients.

On the other hand, the transition from printed page to screen as a primary publishing medium has made writing somewhat less critical and therefore less valued. When you're spending \$40,000 to print this year's annual report, you take pains to make sure the writing sparkles. But when you're putting up a Website in a hurry to meet a tight deadline, you don't worry so much about dotting every I and crossing every T, because you can go back and fix it later.

So finding the most lucrative online writing assignments is tricky. Some writing projects that pay well offline, like articles, are strictly a minimum-wage deal online. Other projects, like landing pages (I'll explain in a minute), can pay eye-popping rates.

Writing business Websites

Smaller companies may ask you to help them create a small Website from scratch. If they're a local mom-and-pop business, budgets are likely to be limited. But a well-heeled small business that recognizes the importance of having strong copy on their Website might be willing to pay a few thousand dollars to have you write a small Website of half a dozen pages or so.

You can charge more for your Web copy when you write search-engine-optimized (SEO) copy. This mainly involves the strategic use of keywords in your text, the purpose of which is to raise the page's ranking in Google or another search engine. Your client might also ask you to help him determine which keywords to optimize his site for, which you can do with tools like www.spacky.com and www.wordtracker.com.

According to freelancer Ed Gandia, writers can charge \$500 to \$800 per page for SEO copy. That includes the copy itself, title tag, description tag, optimized headers and keyword research. Of course, this fee range assumes that there are multiple pages to write. If you are only writing the home page and perhaps one or two other key pages, the per-page fee goes up.

Heather Lloyd-Martin, CEO of Success-Works, says clients pay \$500 to \$1,500, or even \$2,500, per Web page for search-engine-optimized copy. The high end of the fee range is reserved for primary pages on the Website, such as the home page or "About the Company" page. Fortune 500 companies and other large corporations are the most likely to have the budgets to pay top dollar for Web copy.

Another common online writing request from clients is asking you to handle their pay-per-click (PPC) ad campaigns, particularly using Google AdWords. These are brief online ads in which the copy length is strictly limited: a

headline of 25 characters, two lines of body copy with 35 characters each, and a URL link of up to 35 characters.

It's difficult to charge high prices for extremely short copy, so your fee for writing three to five PPC ads might be \$500 to \$1,000 for the series. If you handle the logistics of managing the ad campaign on Google for your client, you can charge up to \$3,000 and perhaps, on top of that, a commission equal to 10 percent of the "ad spend" (the amount of money the client pays Google).

Landing the top Web assignment

In my own copywriting business, the top-paying Web copywriting assignment I handle is writing "landing pages." A landing page is a long-copy sales letter posted on the Web. Its purpose is to sell a product directly from the Web, usually some kind of information product (e.g., an e-book or video training program).

The success of landing-page copy is measured as the "conversion rate" — the percentage of visitors to the landing page who order the product. The conversion rate can range from 1 percent to 15 percent or more. The higher the conversion rate, the more orders the landing page generates, and the more money your client makes with your copy.

Even a beginning copywriter can charge \$1,000 to \$3,000 or more to write a landing page. Experienced pros get anywhere from \$5,000 to as much as \$10,000, and some also collect a small percentage of revenues generated.

For free tips on how to maximize conversion rates on the landing pages you write, visit my Website www.thelandingpageguru.com. You can also get my landing page seminar on video at www.writewinninglandingpages.com, which you may want to spend some time reviewing, since it's a good example of how to write an effective landing page selling an information product.

Clients who hire you to write their landing pages may also ask you to write e-mail marketing messages to drive traffic to those landing pages. Take a look at their previous e-mails before giving a price quote. Some marketers, myself included, use short “teaser” e-mails of only a few paragraphs to drive visitors to the long-copy landing page. You might charge \$500 to write a teaser e-mail. Other companies like long copy in their e-mails, and these can go for \$1,000 or more per e-mail message.

The worst-paying project

The worst-paying online writing assignment is writing articles for Internet marketers and other businesses with Websites. An Internet article is typically shorter than a magazine article—usually no more than 300 words.

Why do businesses need articles? The articles that run in their e-newsletters and that they submit to article directories contain links back to the company’s Website, so they help drive traffic to that site. In addition, the more content you have on your Website, the higher your Website will rank in search engines. Therefore, companies routinely hire writers to write articles, also called “content,” for their Websites.

Unfortunately, with the advent of www.elance.com, www.guru.com, and other job sites for freelancers, competition among writers at the lower level of the craft has become fierce, and writing articles for the Internet has largely turned into a commodity service. There are some writers on Elance, usually living in India or other places with plentiful cheap labor, that charge as little as \$5 to write a 300-word article. Yes, these articles are pretty bad. But many small businesses either can’t tell the difference or don’t care. So unfortunately, there is little money to be made in writing online articles.

Is there an e-book in your future?

In the lingo of Internet marketing, an e-book is content published as a downloadable PDF file. Many freelance writers are attracted to the idea of writing e-books, so let's look at what's involved. To begin with, e-books are much shorter than traditional books, yet sell for higher prices. While a 200-page trade paperback might be 80,000 words, a 50-page e-book is about 15,000 words.

Most Internet marketers who hire freelance writers to write e-books for them pay anywhere from \$300 to \$900 per project. It is almost always a work-or-hire arrangement: The e-book is copyrighted in the client's name, and he—not you—owns all the rights.

However, the real money for writers in e-books is not in ghostwriting them for clients; it is in writing them for yourself and marketing them online. Writing and selling simple information online is the most lucrative opportunity to emerge from the growth of the Internet. I know many writers who earn thousands of dollars a week selling e-books online on topics covering major consumer purchases (e.g., how to buy a used car), money-saving techniques (e.g., how to beat a speeding ticket), career advice and home-based business. And that includes me: As I was writing this column, online sales of my e-books were more than \$9,000 in a single week.

Blogging

There are three ways to make money blogging. The first is to post your own blog and sell advertising on it. Google offers a program, called AdSense, where it places ads on your blog. You are paid a certain amount for each click the ads on your blog generate.

Blogs are inexpensive to create. The time required to set up and maintain one is minimal. But it could take years for your blog to gain popularity.

Advertisers won't invest in blogs until they've proven themselves as high-traffic areas.

Several professional blogging companies, such as 451 Press or DotVentures, will hire writers directly. This is the second method and a great choice for inexperienced bloggers. Professional blogging companies represent hundreds of businesses looking for content, often ghostwritten blogs for CEOs and other top executives. As an employee of a blogging company, you will be required to submit a specific number of posts each month. The blogs will vary in topic and length, and you are paid per post.

Your final option is to contact companies directly. Many companies don't have the time or resources to create and maintain their own blogs. That's why freelance bloggers are in high demand.

You can charge more for your Web copy when you write search-engine-optimized copy. This mainly involves the strategic use of keywords.

Most companies are delighted to use part of their advertising budget to pay a blogger. If you are willing to contact them, you could easily be on the payroll of four, five or even six companies.

Most bloggers can expect to start out making \$2 to \$10 per post when employed with a professional blogging company. Or, as a freelance writer, bloggers average \$1,000 a month from each company they are contracted to blog for. However, because blogging is a new venture, everything is subjective. With the right determination, \$5,000 a month from a single company is conceivable.

Section 3

Must a Freelance Business Writer Have a Website—and What Should Be On Yours?

Must you have a Website highlighting your services, capabilities, experience and skills as a freelance business writer?

If you are starting out, yes, you must; and even if you are experienced, I think you should. Oh, you can still find a few freelance copywriters who don't have Websites and do okay. But they are increasingly at risk of being branded as obsolete or at least out of touch.

We live in an Internet world. Every business client who hires you to write print materials for them will, someday soon if they have not already, ask if you can write online copy for them. If you do not have a Website, it raises doubts about your qualifications as an online copywriter: If you don't believe in the Web enough to have a Website for yourself, how enthusiastic can you be about writing Websites for others?

When potential clients call, one of their first questions is: "Do you have a Website?" Answering "no" is a turn-off to them: today's business prospects want copywriters who are Internet savvy and conversant in the latest electronic marketing techniques. Also, many potential clients turn to Google first to search for freelance copywriters. If you do not have a Website, the chances of them finding you on Google are slim at best.

What to put on your site

The most important things to put on your Website are the facts your potential clients feel they must know before making a decision to hire you. Key

among these are: who you are (your bio), who your clients are, what you charge, and samples of your writing. Note: to see examples of all the various Website sections discussed here, go to my Website www.bly.com and select the page you want to see from the menu bar at left.

Your *bio* should be a single Web page—a standard writer’s bio emphasizing your copywriting and business writing services—selectable from your site’s main menu simply as “Bio.” Some of the things you may want to emphasize in your bio include:

- Business writing or copywriting experience.
- Past employment in the business world (e.g., your last job as a programmer is of interest to software marketers who need application notes and white papers written).
- College degrees and other specialized education relevant to your potential client’s products and services (e.g., if you have a biochemistry degree, health care clients would be impressed).
- A summary of freelance business writing clients and key projects completed to date, with results, if any (if you are a rank beginner, you obviously skip this part until you have a few projects under your belt).
- Names of magazines and newspapers in which your articles have been published (business clients are impressed by writers who have written for magazines and other mainstream media).
- Writing awards related to marketing or business (don’t emphasize awards for novels, poetry, and other creative writing here).
- Books published including title, publisher, and year of publication.

A list of business clients you’ve written for should be posted as a page under the heading *clients*. Tip: by using the heading “Clients/Experience” instead of just “Clients,” you can include organizations you’ve written for as an employee

or volunteer, not just those who are actual clients—a technique that helps make your experience look more well-rounded, especially when you are just starting out.

Perhaps the most important section of your freelance business writing Website is your online *portfolio*, a page where you post samples of your work—again, preferably those related to sales, marketing, employee communications, or other business areas. On www.bly.com, I organize my online portfolio by type of writing assignment (e.g., annual reports, case studies) as well as product or industry (e.g., software, trading systems). When you click on the portfolio, you see thumbnails of the writing samples; clicking on the thumbnail expands the image to a size large enough for the visitor to read the copy.

As for pricing, you can either post your fees on your Website—or send a fee schedule via e-mail as a PDF to potential clients who contact you. Both approaches have pros and cons, but I prefer to send my fee schedule when requested, not post it on my site, for three reasons.

First, it gives the potential client a reason to contact me, which helps me find out more about his needs and initiate a discussion that can lead to a contract. If everything is on your Website, the prospect may simply skim the pages without talking with you, and you lose a valuable opportunity to probe his needs and propose a solution. Second, it's too easy for prospects to misread or misinterpret your fee schedule; I prefer the opportunity to explain the scope of each service, what I include with it, and its value. And third, I don't want to make it easy for my competitors to see my fees.

More stuff for your Website

In addition to the things your clients feel they need to make a decision about hiring you for a writing assignment—e.g., samples of your work, a list of companies you've written for as a freelancer or staffer—you should also post on

your site facts you want the prospect to know about you, because you believe these credentials give you an edge over your competitors and sway the prospect to hire you instead of another writer.

The most important of these items is a page on your Website of *testimonials*: favorable comments from your clients, editors, reviewers, former employers, and others praising you and your writing. How many? The longer, the better, but your Testimonials page should have at least three to five strong testimonials to start; otherwise, it looks too thin.

Have you won any business writing awards? Have articles been written about you and your business writing services? Post links to those articles. Hint: send a press release announcing your new copywriting business along with your photo to your local weekly town paper. The smaller your town, the more likely it is that the paper will run a short article about you, and posting that favorable press coverage on your site helps build credibility.

A good way to market yourself as a freelance business writer is to write how-to articles on business writing, copywriting, marketing, and other topics related to your services and publish them in trade magazines as well as online newsletters. Put up an *articles* page on your Website where you post all your articles. Google gives higher rankings to Websites rich in content, so having an online articles library can increase your site's organic search traffic.

Capturing leads and e-mails

How can you convert traffic on your freelance copywriting Website to immediate inquiries for your copywriting services or at least future prospects? There are two techniques I use that I recommend you also put to work on your site.

The first is to have a *contact* form where someone who might be interested in hiring you for a writing project can request a price quotation from you. If you

go to www.bly.com and click on the burst in the upper right corner that says “Need Great Copy? Click Here Now” it brings you to my contact form (please don’t fill it out!). I always had a link to the contact form in the main menu appearing to the left of the main screen. But when I added the burst and placed it in the upper right corner of every page, my online sales leads nearly tripled.

Some visitors may not have an immediate project but could still be potential clients. Wouldn’t it be nice to capture their e-mail address and send them periodic reminders about you and your freelance copywriting services? You can do this by offering a free online newsletter about writing, marketing, or related topics. Place a sign-up box on your home page offering your free e-newsletter to anyone who submits their e-mail address.

Don’t charge for your e-newsletter. Give it away for free. By doing so, you build a list of subscribers who are interested in the topic of the newsletter (many of whom are potential writing clients) and give you their e-mail address and permission to send e-mails to them, whenever you wish, at virtually no cost.

To build your e-newsletter’s circulation, create an interesting special report or short tip sheet on business writing or another relevant topic (this can be one or more of your articles formatted as a downloadable PDF file). Offering this free information as a bonus gift to people who subscribe to your e-newsletter will greatly increase sign-ups.

Here’s another subscription-building method that works: create a separate domain and Web page where people can sign up for your e-newsletter and get your free bonus gift. This is known in online marketing as a “free-on-free name squeeze page.” You can see my name squeeze page at www.bly.com/reports. Sign up for my free newsletter and you get a library of marketing reports with a retail value of \$116 absolutely free (hence the term “free on free”). By offering this valuable bribe, I convince nearly one out of every two people who visit my

squeeze page to subscribe to my e-newsletter. This is the primary vehicle through which I have built my list of 80,000 online subscribers.

Reserving your domain name

A logical choice of domain name for your freelance copywriting Website is your name or some variation of it. Of course this works best if your name is short, simple to spell, and easy to remember. I am fortunate in that my last name is only three letters, and so chose as my domain name www.bly.com.

If your name is Jane Alexander and www.janealexander.com is already reserved, you can still reserve some variation of it—for example, www.thejanealexander.com. You can reserve domain names for less than ten bucks each at www.ultracheapdomains.com, where you can also find out almost immediately, at no cost, whether the domain name you want is available.

Section 4

Your Intangible USP

Your business—whether you are an information marketer, retailer, catalog merchant, manufacturer, service provider, freelancer, or consultant—has not one but two unique selling propositions (USPs): the tangible and the intangible.

The *tangible* USP is the visible, quantifiable (or at least describable) differentiator between you and your competitors.

Because it can be seen, felt, described, and grasped, the tangible USP is the one you feature in your marketing copy.

Example: years ago, before digital cameras were invented, Polaroid's USP was that its cameras produced instant pictures.

With all other cameras, you had to take the film to get it developed. But with Polaroid, the picture would develop when exposed to air, in about a minute, allowing you to view the image almost instantly.

The *intangible* USP, for most entrepreneurs as well as many larger companies, is your personality and reputation, which in the corporate marketing world might be called your “image.”

The intangible benefit can be just as important in closing sales and attracting repeat business as the tangible benefit.

Yet it takes a secondary place in marketing copy, if it is there at all. The reason is that intangible USPs are difficult to describe in a way that is clear and compelling—even though it may in fact be enormously valuable.

For instance, TP owns a local camera store near my office that sells the same cameras as all other camera stores.

Many of the big chain stores sell these cameras at lower prices and carry a wider selection, giving them a tangible advantage over TP’s little shop.

TP’s advantage over them—in this case, the intangible benefit—is his infectious enthusiasm for the art and craft of photography.

TP is a successful semi-professional photographer whose work has been widely published; he specializes in photographing fires and firefighters.

The most obvious benefit to the customer is superior advice and guidance on camera selection and usage.

But there’s another, even less tangible benefit: when you go to TP’s store, you can talk photography with him, and his enthusiasm is contagious.

Being around TP, a craftsman who takes pride in all of his work—both as a photographer and store owner—gives you a sense of camaraderie with a fellow shutterbug.

It makes you eager to improve and master your craft as an amateur photographer...goals which TP can help you achieve, both with the products he sells for money as well as the advice and mentoring he dispenses for free.

I see a parallel between TP's photo shop and the business of marketing information products, an area of interest to many ETR readers.

The tangible USP you have is usually inherent in either the content of your products or the credentials of your product authors.

You can also build a tangible USP into your offer. For example, Prentice Hall (PH) was selling a book on how to create a marketing plan.

The offer was a 30-day free trial of the book: if you did not like the book, you returned it within 30 days for a refund.

The copywriter who wrote PH's direct mail package to sell the book realized that a customer could get the book, follow the instructions, create the market plan he needed, and then return the book within 30 days for refund—in essence getting a free marketing plan.

He used this fact as the USP in the headline of his letter: "Create a Breakthrough Marketing Plan in 30 Days—Guaranteed or Your Money Back."

But when you are an information marketer, especially on the Internet, you also have an intangible USP that becomes very important to your customers.

That intangible USP is *who you are*—your personality. Even though this intangible USP doesn't translate into sales copy very well, your personality—some marketing experts call it your "personal brand"—is a major factor affecting your sales revenues.

It is an old axiom in selling that customers prefer to do business with people they know and like.

So the more you come across as someone your customers like, respect, and trust, the more they will seek your advice—and in turn, the more information products they will buy from you.

Unlike consumer brands (e.g., Pillsbury and their Dough Boy), successful personal brands are not manufactured by advertising agencies.

They are natural reflections of the information marketer—her personality, experiences, beliefs, strengths, prejudices, opinions, and attitudes.

In using your personal brand to your advantage, it is best to be true to yourself—be the person you really are—rather than to fabricate some artificial persona you *think* more people will like and buy from.

In matters of personal branding, heed motivational speaker Rob Gilbert's formula: SWL + SWL = SW.

This stands for: "Some will like you and your products. Some won't like you and your products. So what?"

Be yourself. It's the only personal brand you can really pull off with credibility.

If you try to be someone you're not, your customers will sense it in everything you write or say—and distance themselves from you.

Yes, your persona will attract some customers and repulse others. But SWL + SWL = SW.

The number of loyal readers and fans you attract by being yourself in your writing will be more than sufficient to earn a handsome living selling information products—reflecting your ideas, way of thinking, and opinions—to your core mailing list.

One more thing: your persona or personal brand is established primarily in your communications with your prospects and customers.

On the Internet, these communications include your e-newsletter...e-mail marketing messages...transactional e-mails...Website...landing pages...blog...tele-seminars...customer service e-mails and phone calls...Facebook account...YouTube videos...and of course your information products.

So while it makes sense to develop your own style in written and spoken communications, you should always present your best, most positive self—the “you” that is most helpful, friendly, and caring about your readers’ success.

That’s something your customers *will* like. A lot.

Section 5

One Website...or Many?

One of my readers, DH, writes:

“When selling information products on the Internet, what are the pros and cons of having a home Website with more than one product, and having micro-sites only for the more expensive and lengthy products vs. having a micro-site for every product?”

I told DH that as an Internet information marketer, he would need a separate landing page for every product.

A landing page, also known as a “micro-site,” is a long-copy sales letter posted on the Web.

The copy on your landing page describes the product and its benefits, and links to a form where visitors can order the product online.

You should have a separate micro-site for each of your information products.

Reason: each of your info products is unique. It’s your proprietary product.

The reader hasn't heard of it before. So he has to be sold on why he should buy it.

To make that sale, you need a long-copy sales letter.

By comparison, if an Internet user goes to www.amazon.com to order the new Harry Potter book, she already knows what Harry Potter is and likes it.

She doesn't need to be sold on it.

That's why Amazon.com sales pages for books are relatively brief vs. the long copy we use on our landing pages to sell information products.

I told DH that each of his product landing pages should have its own unique domain name rather than be individual pages on a central Website.

I advised him to choose a domain name that is easy to remember, so whenever someone asks him about his e-book, he can instantly recall the URL.

For instance, the landing page for my e-book on how to write and sell your first e-book is at www.myveryfirstebook.com.

On your landing page, the only thing the visitor should see is the sales letter copy selling your product.

Don't add a menu bar with a lot of options. And there should be no navigation.

The only thing the visitor can do is either order the product or leave the site. There's no free content he can read or download.

Why? Because we want the visitor to focus on one thing only: the reasons he needs to buy our product today.

However, as effective as these single-product landing pages are for selling information online, there's one thing they don't do very well:

Landing pages are usually ranked low in the search engines ... and therefore do not attract a lot of organic search traffic.

The reason is that Google recognizes them as sales letters. And Google likes content. It doesn't rate sites with sales copy very high.

The solution?

Create a "portal" site for your Internet information publishing business.

Have links to all your individual info product landing pages on this portal site.

Also have several areas of the site encouraging visitors to opt into your e-list by subscribing to your online newsletter or downloading a free report.

Next, add one or more sections to the portal site where visitors can find, read, and download free content.

What kind of free content can you post on your portal site?

Articles...press releases...special reports...videos...audios...content-rich Web pages.

Why are we adding all this free content to our portal site?

Because Google loves content, and will therefore rank the portal site much higher than the product landing pages.

That way, we'll benefit from organic search traffic and get lots of visitors.

A percentage of those visitors either click onto one of the landing pages and buy a product;

Or, they click on a box or banner that lets them opt into your e-list.

Result: you sell more products and build your list organically instead of having to buy traffic.

I also like having a portal site because, when someone asks me what products I sell, I can't remember them all.

But I can remember the URL for my portal site. I tell them that they can find every product I sell at www.ctcpublishing.net.

The portal site serves one additional function for the information marketer: it further solidifies your credentials as a subject matter expert in your niche.

There are lots of info product marketers selling products on every conceivable topic on the Internet.

The ones that sell info products on the same topics you write about are your competitors.

Often, the reader perceives little difference between e-books or tele-seminars on a given topic.

What helps differentiate the info products...and close the sale...is the reputation of the author/publisher as a guru in her field.

The content-rich portal site gives you an instant online presence that sets you apart—and causes readers to trust you enough to buy your products.

Section 6

Do Your Subscribers Think Your E-mails are Junk?

DT, one of my subscribers, recently wrote to tell me how much he enjoys my e-mails.

“They are fun to read, and you do supply positive answers and details,” write DT. “So I buy from you when a topic you have fits my paradigms.”

But he was less enamored with the e-mails he is receiving from some of my fellow Internet marketers.

“They come across in a way that literally chases away their customers,” he complained.

DT said of one Internet marketer: “I have bought all of his books in the past so I joyfully joined his list just to get more of his great information.

“Unfortunately I found that most of his posts do not have good information but instead have him ranting about this and that.”

Of another famous Internet marketer, DT complained: “I have been on his list for 3 weeks, and about every day I get a sales letter, and that's it. I do love sales letters, but not all the time.”

So what did DT do?

“I've quit both of their lists and I'll probably never buy from either of them again,” he told me.

DT's complaint is not unusual, by the way.

If you send sales messages too frequently...or if too many of your e-mails are pure product pitches vs. useful content...you are going to get complaints.

So how do you find the right frequency and balance between sales and content?

The number of e-mail marketing messages you can send to your list per month depends on several factors.

These factors include the timeliness of your content...value of your content...and the frequency with which you publish your e-newsletter.

Here's a useful rule of thumb...

If your e-newsletter is published monthly, you can send e-mail marketing messages to the subscribers two or three times a week.

As an Internet marketer, the more e-mail marketing messages you broadcast to your subscriber list, the more money you make.

Say each time you send an e-mail marketing message to your list, it brings in (on average) \$3,000 in revenues.

You send two e-mail marketing messages each week, making \$6,000 a week in sales.

If your subscribers tolerate it, and you increase the frequency from two to three times a week, you'd make \$9,000 instead of \$6,000 a week—and earn an extra \$150,000 a year.

How do you know whether your subscribers are OK with the increased frequency—or if you are ticking them off?

Keep an eye on your opt-out rate.

Each time you send an e-mail to your list, a small number of subscribers will opt out, asking to be removed from your e-list.

As a rule of thumb, aim for an opt-out rate of 0.1% or less, and certainly no more than 0.2% per e-mail.

If you have a list of 50,000 subscribers and your opt-out rate is 0.1%, you lose 50 subscribers every time you distribute another e-mail to your list.

Measure your opt-out rate so you know the average.

Then, when you increase your e-mail frequency, watch what happens to the opt-out rate.

If it stays the same, you know your subscribers don't have a problem getting an extra e-mail from you each week.

So send those extra e-mails, and make more money from your Internet business.

Consultant Amy Africa says, "Most online marketers do not mail often enough to their e-list."

But what if increasing frequency causes your opt-out rate to spike higher?

It means subscribers are telling you they don't want to hear from you that often...and you should cut back to the old schedule.

What about the ratio of content to sales pitch?

In my monthly e-newsletter, I aim for 80/20—80% or more is pure content, and 20% or less is recommended products.

In my twice-weekly e-mails, 50% to 75% are e-mail marketing messages, and the other 25% to 50% pure content.

To shift the balance more in favor of content, which is what many subscribers prefer, here's a little trick I use:

When possible, I write my e-mail marketing messages so they read like content e-mails.

Often I actually include content (ideas, tips) in the e-mail marketing message.

When you write your e-mail marketing messages with an educational tone, the reader perceives it as content—even though it is ultimately selling a product.

They are happy. And you make more sales.

One other suggestion...

When you get a complaint from a subscriber about too many e-mail marketing messages, look up the complainer in your shopping cart software.

Nine out of ten times you'll find this is a person who has never bought a thing from you...and therefore, why do you care what he thinks—or whether he leaves you?

By the way, if your info-publishing niche is marketing, like mine is, your e-mail marketing messages themselves are educational for your readers—showing them how to write e-mails that sell.

In fact, one of my best-selling e-books, "The E-Mail Swipe File," is a collection of about five dozen of my e-mail marketing messages.

Each chapter includes the full text of the e-mail message...the results it generated...and my analysis of why it worked:

www.emailswipefile.com

Section 7

10 Tips for Increasing Landing Page Conversion Rates

There's lots of buzz about blogging, viral marketing, social networking, and other new methods of generating eyeballs and traffic online. But all that traffic won't make you any money unless you can convert those unique visitors to leads or customers.

Depending on whether you are selling a product directly from your landing page, asking visitors to download a free white paper, or promoting a Webinar or demonstration, conversion rates can range from as low as one percent or less to as much as 50 percent or more. Here are 10 keys to writing landing pages that maximize online conversion rates:

1—Build credibility early. People have always been skeptical of advertising, and with the proliferation of spam and shady operators, they are even more skeptical of what they read online. Therefore, your landing page copy must immediately overcome that skepticism.

One way to do that is to make sure one or more “credibility builders” is clearly displayed on the first screen the visitor sees. In the banner at the top of the page, use your logo and company name if you are well known; universities, associations, and other institutions can place their official seal in the upper left of the screen.

Within or immediately under the banner, put a strong testimonial or three above the headline on the first screen. Consider adding a pre-head or subhead which summarizes the company's mission statement or credentials. At www.bnasoftware.com, the positioning statement is: “The nation's definitive income tax management solution.”

2—*Capture the e-mail addresses of non-buyers.* There are a number of mechanisms available for capturing the e-mail address of visitors who click on your landing page but do not buy the product. One is to use a window with copy offering a free report or e-course in exchange for submitting e-mail address. This window can be served to the visitor as a pop-up (it appears when the visitor arrives at the landing page) or a pop-under (a window that appears when the visitor attempts to leave the landing page without making an inquiry or purchase). These are both blocked by pop-up blockers. A “floater” is a window that slides onto the screen from the side or top. Unlike the pop-up and pop-under, the floater is part of the Website HTML code, so it is not stopped by the pop-up blocker.

3—*Use lots of testimonials.* Testimonials build credibility and overcome skepticism, as do case studies and white papers posted on the Website. If you invite customers to a live event, ask if they would be willing to give you a brief testimonial recorded on video. Have a professional videographer tape it, get a signed release from the customer, and post the testimonial on your Website as streaming video. Require the customer to click a button to hear the testimonial, rather than have the video play automatically when the visitor clicks on the page.

For written testimonials, customers may suggest that you write what you want them to say and just run it by them for approval. Politely ask that they give you their opinion of your product in their own words instead of having you do it. Reason: what they come up with will likely be more specific, believable, and detailed than your version, which might smack of puffery and promotion.

4—*Use lots of bullets.* Highlight key features and benefits in a list of short, easy-to-read bulleted items. I often use a format where the first part of the bullet is the feature, and after a dash comes the benefit; e.g., “**Quick-release adhesive system**—your graphics stay clean and don’t stick together.” Online buyers like to think they are getting a lot for their money, so when selling a product directly

from your landing page, be sure all major features and important benefits are covered in a comprehensive bullet list appearing on your landing page.

When generating leads by giving away white papers, you don't need a huge list of bulleted features and benefits. But using bullets to describe the contents of the paper and the benefits that information delivers can raise conversion rates for download requests.

5—*Arouse curiosity in the headline.* The headline should arouse curiosity, make a powerful promise, or otherwise grab the reader's attention so he has no choice but to keep reading. The headline for a landing page selling a training program on how to become a professional property locator makes a big promise: "Become a Property Locator Today—and Make \$100,000 a Year in the Greatest Real Estate Career That Only a Few Insiders Know About."

6—*Use a conversational copy style.* Most corporate Websites are unemotional and sterile: just "information." But a landing page is a letter from one human being to another. Make it sound that way. Even if your product is highly technical and you are selling it to techies, remember that they are still human beings, and you cannot sell something by boring people to death.

7—*Incorporate an emotional hook in the headline and lead paragraph.* Logical selling can work, but tapping into the prospect's emotions is much stronger—especially when you correctly assess how the prospect is feeling about your product or the problem it solves right now.

Another effective tactic for lead-generation landing pages is to stress your free offer in the headline and lead. Example: Kaydon's landing page shows a picture of its catalog with the bold heading above it reading, "FREE Ceramic Bearings Product Selection Guide."

8—*Solve the reader's problem.* Once you hook the reader with emotional copy dramatizing her problem or a powerful free offer, show how your product—or

your free information—can help solve their problem. For example: “Now there is a better, easier, and more effective solution to wobbly restaurant tables that can irritate customers and ruin their dining experience: Table Shox, the world’s smallest shock absorber.”

To maximize landing page conversion rates, you have to convince the visitor that the quickest route to solving his problem is taking the action indicated on the landing page, and not—as you might be tempted to let him do—surfing your site. That’s why I prefer landing pages to appear with no navigation, so the reader’s only choice is to respond or not respond; there’s no menu of click buttons and hyperlinks to other interesting pages to distract him.

9—Make it timely and current. The more your online copy ties in with current events and news, the higher your response rates. This is especially critical when selling financial and investment information as well as regulatory compliance products in fields where laws and rules change frequently. Periodically update your landing page copy to reflect current business and economic conditions, challenges, and trends. This shows your visitor that your company is current with and on top of what’s happening in your industry today.

10—Stress the money-back guarantee or lack of commitment on the part of the user. If you allow customers to order products directly from the landing page, make sure you have a money-back guarantee clearly stated on that page. All your competitors give strong money-back guarantees. So you can’t get away without doing the same. If your product is good and your copy truthful, your refund rates can be as low as 1 percent or even less.

If you are generating leads, stress that your offer—which might be a white paper, online demonstration, or Webinar—is free. Say there is no obligation to buy and that no salesperson will visit.

Section 8

4 Easy Steps to Successful SEO Copywriting

It's ironic: SEO/SEM consultants are springing up all over the place, like dandelions in spring. Yet none of them seem to agree much on the best practices, methods, and standards for optimizing Websites.

As a result, I've found that the worst thing about optimizing my Website for search engines, which I am doing now, is the often conflicting and even contradictory advice I get from the various SEO specialists I hire or talk with.

For instance, one SEO consultant who looked at the Website for my freelance copywriting business, www.bly.com, gave me these very specific guidelines for writing a page about my freelance copywriting services optimized for the keyword phrase "freelance copywriter."

Specifically, his instructions were:

- >> Freelance copywriter should be the first words on the page.
- >> Freelance copywriter should be included near the beginning of the first sentence.
- >> Freelance copywriter should be near the end of the second paragraph.
- >> Freelance copywriter should be in a subhead between the second and third paragraph.
- >> Freelance copywriter should be near the end of the third paragraph.
- >> Freelance copywriter should be in a subhead between the third and fourth paragraph.
- >> Freelance copywriter should be in the fourth paragraph.
- >> In the last paragraph, freelance copywriter is in the first sentence and at the very end of the last sentence.

The SEO consultant told me that to follow these specifications would result in a home page that search engines would like. But as a copywriter, I could easily see that any copy written to fully conform to these rigid guidelines would sound incredibly stilted and awkward, making me look incompetent. So I asked a few of my colleagues whether the above guidelines are in fact right or as nutty as I believed them to be.

“My advice is always to write for people, not search engines,” says copywriter Dianna Huff. “Yes, it's good to place the correct keywords in the body copy, and yes, it's correct to place your most important keyword at the beginning of the title tag and in the headline of the page.

“However, you don't *have* to do this to achieve high rankings. And you certainly should not do it if your copy ends up sounding “spammy.” If you want a site to rank well, you do have to optimize it, but not at the expense of the marketing objectives. Copy should be written for people, not search engines.”

“Over the years, the tactic I found that works best is to have the most targeted keywords towards the top of the page and work your way down, like a reverse pyramid,” says Internet marketing consultant Wendy Montesdeoca. “The entire page should be keyword dense, and there can be some repetition, but from my understanding of search engine spiders, they like more organic content.

“So what I found that works is to make a list of the top 10-15 keywords and use that naturally, organically, and reader friendly in the content. And of course use your top 5 keywords in the alt, meta, and title tags. For instance, if there's a picture of Bob, don't just have ‘Bob Bly’ —have ‘Bob Bly, freelance copywriter.’”

Do you want to write Web pages that sparkle with style, persuade your prospects, and please search engine spiders all at the same time? Let me share with you a simple 4-step SEO copywriting process that has worked for me:

1—*Keyword research.* The first step is to come up with a list of keywords and phrases for which you want to optimize the page you are writing. These should be the keywords and phrases people use when searching for your product or service on the Internet.

You can brainstorm what these words might be, then use any number of online tools to find out which ones are the most popular. Two tools I use are www.wordtracker.com and www.spacky.com. For detailed instructions on how to conduct keyword research and discovery visit www.thekeywordmoneymachine.com.

2—*Write the best copy you can—for the human reader.* Just sit down and write the best damn copy you can about the topic. Don't even think about keywords as you write. Concentrate 100 percent on sounding like one human being talking to another about a subject he is enthusiastic about and wants to share.

3—*Insert keywords from your keyword list.* Now go back and insert keywords from your list into the copy, wherever and as frequently as you can, without disturbing the style, tone, meaning, and persuasiveness of the copy. If forcing a keyword in disrupts the flow of the copy, don't do it.

For instance, on www.bly.com, one line of the original home page copy read: "Call on freelance copywriter and Internet marketing strategist Bob Bly." I like the sound of strategist. But our keywords research showed that people search for Internet marketing consultants, not strategists. So we changed the copy to read "Internet marketing consultant."

In another paragraph, we talked about my experience as a copywriter, saying that I know "how to craft landing pages that drive conversions through the roof." Once again, I like the variety of using "craft" as a verb. But to optimize the sentence with the keyword "copy," I changed it to "how to write potent, compelling copy for landing pages that drive conversions through the roof."

Another keyword phrase that came up in our research was “make money online,” and so we added that to the sentence: “landing pages that drive conversions through the roof—and make more money online.”

One of the keyword phrases that ranked highly in our research was “online copywriting.” Any time you can replace a non-keyword-phrase with a keyword phrase, with no harm to the copy, you should. So we changed “they call on Bob Bly to write their most important online marketing campaigns” (people were not searching for “campaigns”) to “they call on Bob Bly when they need online copywriting that sells.”

4—Write keyword rich meta tags for each Web page. The most important meta tags are the title and description tags. The title tag is what your visitors see at the top of their browser windows when they visit your site, as well as what they see in their bookmark lists. Failure to put strategic keywords in the title tag can result in pages being poorly ranked. The title tag can be a maximum 95 characters including spaces, but ideally no longer than 6 or 7 words. The description tag—a maximum of 220 characters with spaces.

When your Website comes up in a Google search, the description tag is what the user sees on the search engine results page (SERP). It should incorporate strategic keywords and clearly communicate what you offer, who it is for, and the key benefit. Your major keywords should also be placed in the keywords meta tag, though Google pays less attention to the keyword meta tag than to the title and description tags.

When you go to www.bly.com, you will see that I violated the rules of SEO copywriting by not having the keyword “copywriting” in the headline. But not revealing what you are selling in the headline can be an effective way to engage the reader, so in this case I chose the human reader over the search engine spider. You can visit the site and decide whether it works.

Section 9

How to Write Subject Lines That Get Your E-mail Opened and Read

When prospects get your e-mail marketing message, they make a quick decision, usually in a couple of seconds, to open or delete it based largely on the subject line. But given the glut of promotional e-mail today, how can you convince a busy prospect—in just a few words—that your message is worthy of attention?

The “4 U’s” copywriting formula—which stands for urgent, unique, ultra-specific, and useful—can help.

Originally developed by my colleague Michael Masterson for writing more powerful headlines; the 4 U’s formula works especially well with e-mail subject lines. I’ll share it with you now.

According to this formula, strong subject lines are:

- *Urgent.* Urgency gives the reader a reason to act now instead of later. You can create a sense of urgency in your subject line by incorporating a time element. For instance, “Make \$100,000 working from home this year” has a greater sense of urgency than “Make \$100,000 working from home.” A sense of urgency can also be created with a time-limited special offer, such as a discount or premium if you order by a certain date.
- *Unique.* The powerful subject line either says something new, or if it says something the reader has heard before, says it in a new and fresh way. For example, “Why Japanese women have beautiful skin” was the subject line in an e-mail promoting a Japanese bath kit. This is different than the typical “Save 10% on Japanese Bath Kits.”

- *Ultra-specific.* Boardroom is the absolute master of ultra-specific bullets, known as “fascinations,” that tease the reader into reading further and ordering the product. Examples: “What never to eat on an airplane,” “Bill’s it’s okay to pay late,” and “Best time to file for a tax refund.” They use such fascinations in direct mail as envelope teasers and in e-mail as subject lines.
- *Useful.* The strong subject line appeals to the reader’s self-interest by offering a benefit. In the subject line “An Invitation to Ski & Save,” the benefit is saving money.

When you have written your subject line, ask yourself how strong it is in each of these 4 U’s. Use a scale of 1 to 4 (1 = weak, 4 = strong) to rank it in each category.

Rarely will a subject line rate a 3 or 4 on all four U’s. But if your subject line doesn’t rate a 3 or 4 on at least *three* of the U’s, it’s probably not as strong as it could be—and can benefit from some rewriting.

A common mistake is to defend a weak subject line by pointing to a good response. A better way to think is as follows: If the e-mail generated a profitable response despite a weak subject line, imagine how much more money you could have made by applying the 4 U’s.

A software marketer wrote to tell me he had sent out a successful e-mail marketing campaign with the subject line “Free White Paper.” How does this stack up against the 4 U’s?

- *Urgent.* There is no urgency or sense of timeliness. On a scale of 1 to 4, with 4 being the highest rating, “Free White Paper” is a 1.
- *Unique.* Not every software marketer offers a free white paper, but a lot of them do. So “Free White Paper” rates only a 2 in terms of uniqueness.

- *Ultra-specific.* Could the marketer have been less specific than “Free White Paper”? Yes, he could have just said “free bonus gift.” So we rate “Free White Paper” a 2 instead of a 1.
- *Useful.* I suppose the reader is smart enough to figure the white paper contains some helpful information he can use. On the other hand, the usefulness is in the specific information contained in the paper, which isn’t even hinted at in the headline. And does the recipient, who already has too much to read, really need yet another “Free White Paper”? I rate it a 2. Specifying the topic would help, e.g., “Free White Paper shows how to cut training costs up to 90% with e-learning.”

I urge you to go through this exercise with every e-mail subject line you write. You can also apply the formula to other copy, both online and offline, including direct mail envelope teasers, ad headlines, letter leads, Web page headlines, subheads, and bullets.

Rate the line you’ve written in all four U’s. Then rewrite it so you can upgrade your rating on at least 2 and preferably 3 or 4 of the categories by at least 1. This simple exercise may increase readership and response rates substantially for very little effort.

Section 10

The 3 Most Important Things I’ve Learned About Writing E-Mail Marketing Copy

In this column, I want to share with you the three most important things I’ve learned about writing winning e-mail marketing campaigns.

The first is: when your e-mail copy makes reference to what's going on in the news the same week—or even better, the same day—you distribute it, your response rates soar.

Financial publishers were probably the first to discover this: e-mail messages that reflect what's going on in the market on the day they are distributed—for instance, “gold hits \$700 per ounce ... should you sell or buy more?”—pull much better than generic promotional e-mails or those with evergreen content.

Example: the publisher of a financial newsletter boosted subscriptions by referencing the Martha Stewart case during her trial. Headline: “Stay one step ahead of the stock market, just like Martha Stewart...but *without* her legal liability.” The HTML e-mail even included a color photo of Martha looking contrite on the courthouse steps—an image the reader probably saw daily on TV and in the newspapers, and which therefore immediately attracted his eye.

The idea of including news in your copy is not new. But e-mail marketing makes it easier to more precisely coordinate and time your e-mail messages with current events and developments.

Of course, it is easier to tie in with news and current events for some products than others. A company that sells aluminum siding to homeowners might find it more difficult to link their e-mail copy to the president's latest speech than a company promoting penny stocks.

But it's not impossible. And any time your e-mail can reflect news or trends, readership and response are likely to soar.

My second tip for writing winning e-mail messages: giving away content in the e-mail itself is, contrary to what you might expect, a way to strengthen copy and results.

I say “contrary to what you might expect” because, you might reason, “If I give the information away in the e-mail, the reader’s curiosity is satisfied, and he does not have to click through to find the answers he is looking for.”

The trick is to give “partial content” — as a sample of the kind of help your product, service, or firm offers.

Ideally, this could be something as quick as a simple how-to tip embedded in the e-mail copy. Then, you promise many more useful tips and advice when the reader clicks through.

This works for two reasons. First, people are trained on the Internet to expect free content, so this technique fulfills their expectation.

Second, including actual content in your e-mail marketing—and not just teasing the reader with promises to provide valuable content when they respond—demonstrates your expertise and knowledge right then and there in the e-mail. The reader is quickly convinced you know what you are talking about—and therefore, may be a resource he wants to know better.

My third tip for writing winning e-mail messages: open rates and click-through rates both increase when your e-mail marketing messages match—in look, content, tone, and style—the other e-mails prospects get from you or the list owner on a regular basis.

For instance, if your e-mail is going to an opt-in list of subscribers to a text e-newsletter, your response will be better if you send a text e-mail rather than an HTML. If people on your list are used to extremely short e-mail messages, a long-copy e-mail blast probably won’t work as well as a short teaser e-mail linked to a landing page where they can read the rest of your message.

Take a look at past e-mail promotions to the list that worked as well as issues of e-newsletters these readers receive. If they all contain graphs...or

technical information...or pictures of pets...or news...or a pithy how-to tip...or survey results...then your e-mail probably should, too.

Reason: people on a given list are “trained” to accept e-mails with similar look and feel to the ones they get regularly. When your e-mail matches their expectations, they believe it’s something they read regularly and open it. When your e-mail looks wildly different, they view it as spam and delete.

This is contrary to the creative approach Madison Avenue favors in print advertising, which is to make their ads look different from all others the reader has seen.

Section 11

5 Steps to Writing the Perfect Guarantee

“Use a strong guarantee” is standard advice in direct marketing.

Without a strong guarantee, your sales will slow to a trickle—since buyers are loathe to buy products over the Internet, phone, or by mail sight unseen.

But what exactly makes for a “strong” guarantee?

A strong guarantee has 5 defining characteristics—and your guarantee should possess these qualities, too.

>> First, length: as a rule of thumb, the longer the guarantee, the better.

Typical guarantee periods are 10, 14, 30, 60, 90, 180, and 365 days.

Of these, 10 days is the weakest, because it requires the prospect to act too quickly for comfort.

The buyer is afraid that, if he puts the product aside, the guarantee coverage will expire, and he’ll be stuck with a product he can’t return.

And so he doesn’t order in the first place.

30 days is a standard guarantee period, and certainly adequate.

60 and 90 days are better—all the information products I publish and sell online are guaranteed for 90 days.

I don't like lifetime guarantees, because it creates a financial liability on the books that may be problematic when it's time to sell your business.

6 and 12-month guarantees may be worth testing, but won't work for some products—for instance; a 1-year guarantee doesn't make sense for an annual directory.

>> The second consideration is the conditionality of the guarantee.

Meaning: are there strings attached? Or is it unconditional?

A conditional guarantee might say: return the product in saleable condition for your money back.

The buyer is concerned that you will quibble with him over “saleable condition.”

That is, you will refuse to issue a refund for a book he returned because, say, the dust jacket has a smudge on it.

Another conditional guarantee is the one used by many sellers of small business and investment home study programs.

They say: if you are not satisfied, send back the course for a refund; just “prove to us that you made some effort to follow our system.”

When you ask for a refund, they ask for more and more proof—and whatever you send, the sellers counters that “you didn't do what we said” (or do enough of it)—and denies your refund on that basis.

Much better is to offer an unconditional guarantee. Tell the customer all he has to do is return the product for a full refund—no ifs, ands, or buts—without question or quibble.

>> The third quality of a strong guarantee is that everything is clearly stated and spelled out.

Be careful about wording that the consumer can misinterpret.

For instance, a performance-based guarantee—“If you do not earn extra money trading options with our program, return it for a refund”—sounds good but contains a potential concern....

Does it mean that if I DO make some extra money with the product, I *can't* return it? Even if I only made ten bucks?

Rewrite the guarantee so there is no condition or ambiguity stated or implied:

“If you do not make extra money trading options with our program, or you are not 100% satisfied for any other reason—or for no reason—just return the program within 90 days for a full refund.”

>> Fourth, the guarantee should be graphically emphasized within the promotion.

Don't bury it in body copy or put it in an asterisked footnote in 8-point type.

Print the guarantee in 12-point copy with a large, bold headline. Put a box or even a certificate-style border around it to make the guarantee stand out.

>> Fifth, how generous is the guarantee?

The best guarantees are unfair—but unfair in favor of the buyer, not the seller.

That means if the customer takes advantage of the guarantee, the seller is, in a sense, getting ripped off.

Example: for regular books sold via mail order, the guarantee is simple: return the book and we will send you your money back.

But think about the same guarantee for e-books....

Can the customer really send you the e-book back?

Do you expect them to send back the copy they printed out ... or sign an affidavit that they erased the e-book from their hard drive ... or shredded the print-out? (Some online marketers have done just that!)

Most information marketers skirt the issue of returning e-books in their guarantees.

They say: if you are not 100% satisfied, let us know within 90 days for a full refund.

No discussion about returning or erasing or not using the e-book takes place.

In the landing pages I write to sell the e-books I publish (see for example www.myveryfirstbook.com), I go a step further:

I turn the fact that the customer does not have to return the e-book to me into a benefit.

I say: "If you are not 100% satisfied, let us know within 90 days for a full refund.

"And keep the e-book free, with my compliments. That way, you risk nothing."

I always suspected that this overly generous offer boosted my sales, but never split tested it.

In a recent Internet marketing seminar, DP, who heard me talk about this point in my presentation, said that he too tells his customers to keep the e-book even if they ask for a refund.

But DP has split-tested it. And he swears that "keep the e-book free" increased his conversion rates on average by 21%.

The bottom line: when writing copy, make sure your guarantee is:

>> Long—90 days is ideal for most offers.

>> Unconditional—no strings attached.

>> Clearly stated with no ambiguity or possibility of misunderstanding.

>> Highlighted with bold typography, color, and graphics so it really stands out on the screen or page.

>> Overly generous—so that if the consumer exercises the guarantee, he is essentially taking almost unfair advantage of you, the seller.

The overriding principle of a strong guarantee is to take all the risk off the buyer's shoulders and place it on the seller's shoulders—as it should be.

Section 12

How to Lie with Statistics

Whenever I am writing copy, I like to gather lots of statistics on my topic.

The great thing about statistics is that you can always use them to support almost any sales point you want to make in your promotion.

In fact, the same statistic can often be interpreted either to make a sales point or its opposite!

For example, the statistic of number of units sold is often cited to prove that a product is popular and therefore must be good.

In the good old days, McDonald's restaurant signs would proclaim "Over 1 Billion Sold."

Advertisements for books frequently tell us that the book is a "New York Times best-seller."

The logic is that because the product is so popular, people think the product is good, and therefore it must be good.

(Of course it is not true: there are many restaurants that make hamburgers better than McDonald's.)

Ironically, a statistic that says the exact opposite of “this product is a best-seller” — a number showing it does not sell well — can also be used to make the case for superior quality.

Perhaps you have received in the mail a catalog for Harry & David, the mail order gift fruit company selling Royal Riviera Pears.

The copy says, “Not one person in a thousand has ever tasted them.”

It makes the product sound exclusive, special, rare, and desirable.

But what it really means is very few people buy them!

Here’s another example of how to use statistics in your favor.

I was asked to write a brochure for a company that did competitive research for manufacturers.

I asked the client about the competition and where his firm stood in the marketplace.

“That’s a negative,” he said. “There are hundreds of small mom-and-pop operators doing this kind of research out of their homes, but only five real companies — and of those five, we are unfortunately the smallest.”

In the brochure copy, I wrote: “XYZ Research Associates is one of the 5 largest industrial research companies in North America” — turning a potential negative into a bragging point.

Here are a few additional guidelines for using statistics and numbers to make the case that your product or service is superior:

>> Write numbers using the largest units of measure...“a quarter of a century” sounds longer than “25 years.”

>> Round off to make numbers sound larger...if the client tells me their newsletter has 2,015 subscribers, I talk about the “thousands of satisfied subscribers.”

>> Use “negative statistics”...say what the product doesn’t do or have, rather than what it does do or have. For instance, club soda has “no sodium, no artificial flavors, no calories.”

>> Prove statistical points with pictures...compare two quantities with a bar chart, or show a price chart illustrating how shares of the stock you recommended went up.

>> Say it multiple times...give the persuasive statistic at least three times: in the body copy, in the chart or graph, and in a caption for the chart or graph.

>> Make unexpected comparisons to dramatize numbers...a speaker giving a talk on health told his listeners “more people have died from malaria over the past century than are now living in the United States” —much more memorable than just giving a number.

Section 13

5 Ways to Capture E-mail Addresses of Landing Page Visitors

Most Internet marketers I know who use landing pages to make direct sales online focus on conversion: getting the maximum number of visitors to the landing page to place an order for the product being advertised.

Other Internet marketers, when writing landing page copy, focus not only on conversion, but also on search engine optimization: keyword selection and meta tag creation that can increase traffic by raising the site’s search engine rankings.

But in addition to conversions and unique visits, savvy Internet marketers are also concerned with a third performance metric: e-mail address capture.

If you have a two percent conversion rate, then for every 100 visitors to the landing page, only two buy—and of course, during these transactions, you capture the e-mail addresses of those buyers.

What happens to the other 98 visitors—those who do not buy? You will not be able to add their e-mail address to your list unless you incorporate a deliberate methodology into your landing page to capture it.

Here are four different methodologies for capturing the e-mail addresses of landing page visitors who do not purchase. Every landing page you operate should use at least one of these methods:

1. *E-zine sign-up box*. This is a box where the visitor can get a free e-newsletter subscription just by entering his name and e-mail address. You can see an example of a simple e-zine sign-up box at www.bly.com and countless other Websites.

The e-zine sign-up box placed prominently on the first screen is a widely used method of e-mail capture for Websites. But it is less commonly used for micro-sites and landing pages.

The reason is that, if your headline and lead properly engage the reader's attention, he won't bother to sign up for the e-newsletter—instead, he'll start reading.

Then, if he loses interest or reaches the end but does not order, and instead clicks away, you haven't captured his e-mail address.

2. *Squeeze pages*. Also known as preview pages, these are short landing pages that require the visitor to register—by giving his name and e-mail address—before he is allowed to go on and read the long-copy landing page. To see a squeeze page at work, visit www.squeezepagegenerator.com.

In some cases, the long-copy landing page itself is positioned as a “report” which the visitor can read only if he submits his name and e-mail address first. For

this to work, your landing page should be written in an informative, educational style.

Many squeeze pages offer a content premium, such as a free report, just for submitting your e-mail address. Those seeking to capture snail mail as well as e-mail addresses make the premium a physical object that must be shipped, such as a free CD.

Squeeze pages work well when your primary source of traffic is organic and paid search. Reason: search visitors clicking to your site are only mildly qualified, because they are making a decision to visit based on only a few words in a search engine description or paid Google ad.

Therefore, they may not be inclined to read long copy from a source they are not familiar with. A squeeze page lets them absorb the gist of your proposition in a few concise paragraphs. The main advantage of the squeeze page is that it ensures capture of an e-mail address from every visitor who reads the full landing page. In addition, these prospects have been pre-qualified, in terms of their interest in the subject, and so are more likely to stick with long copy.

3. *E-mail capture sidebars.* These are forms built into the main landing page as sidebars, again making a free offer. In a long-copy landing page, the e-mail capture sidebar usually appears early, typically in the second or third screen, and may be repeated one or more times throughout the page. Example:

www.rocketfrench.com.

The drawback of the e-mail capture sidebar is that the prospect sees it before he gets too far in the sales letter, and therefore before you've sold him and ask for the order.

Therefore, the risk is that if your product teaches, say, how to speak French, and the e-mail capture sidebar offers free French lessons, the visitor will just take the free offer and feel no need to spend money on the paid offer.

4. *Pop-under*. When you attempt to click away from the landing page without making a purchase, a window appears that says something like, “Wait! Don’t leave yet!” — and makes a free offer. To see how this works, go to one of my sites, www.becomeaninstantguru.com.

The big advantage of the pop-under is that the visitor sees it only *after* he has read to the point where he is leaving without ordering. Therefore, the free content offer doesn’t compete with or distract visitors from the paid product offer.

The disadvantage is that about half of Internet users run pop-up blockers on their PCs, and these blockers will prevent your pop-under from showing.

5. *Floater*. A floater looks and functions much like a pop-up window, but it’s actually part of the landing page’s HTML code, and therefore, won’t be blocked by a pop-up blocker. You can see a floater at www.bhg.com.

The floater blocks a portion of the landing page when you click onto the site. You can enter your e-mail or click it away without doing so. Either action removes the floater and allows you to see the complete landing page.

As you can see, all of these e-mail capture methods offer some sort of free content—typically a downloadable PDF report, e-course delivered via auto-responder, or e-zine subscription—in exchange for your e-mail address.

Why bother to maximize capture of visitor e-mail addresses on your landing pages and other Websites?

There are two primary benefits. First, by sending an online conversion series—a sequence of e-mails delivered by auto-responder—to these visitors, you have another opportunity to convince them to buy and increase your overall conversion rate.

Second, the best names for your e-mail marketing efforts, far better than rented opt-in lists, are in your house e-list. So the faster you can build a large e-list, the more profitable your Internet marketing ventures will become.

How much more profitable? Internet marketing expert Fred Gleeck estimates that, for information product marketers, each name on your e-list is worth between ten cents and a dollar or more per name per month.

Therefore, a 50,000-name e-list could generate annual online revenues of \$600,000 a year or higher. In other businesses, the sales could be significantly higher. Hewlett-Packard has 4.5 million e-zine subscribers, from whom they generate \$60 million in monthly sales.*

**B-to-B, 4/4/05.*

About the Author

BOB BLY is an independent copywriter and consultant with more than 20 years of experience in business-to-business, high tech, industrial, and direct marketing.

Bob has written copy for over 100 clients including: Network Solutions, ITT Fluid Technology, Medical Economics, Intuit, Business & Legal Reports and Brooklyn Union Gas. Awards include a Gold Echo from the Direct Marketing Association, an IMMY from the Information Industry Association, two Southstar Awards, an American Corporate Identity Award of Excellence, and the Standard of Excellence award from the Web Marketing Association.

He is the author of more than 50 books including *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Direct Marketing* (Alpha Books) and *The Copywriter's Handbook* (Henry Holt & Co.). His articles have appeared in numerous publications such as *DM News*, *Writer's Digest*, *Amtrak Express*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Inside Direct Mail*, and *Bits & Pieces for Salespeople*.

Bob has presented marketing, sales, and writing seminars for such groups as the U.S. Army, Independent Laboratory Distributors Association, American

Institute of Chemical Engineers and the American Marketing Association. He also taught business-to-business copywriting and technical writing at New York University.

Bob writes sales letters, direct mail packages, ads, e-mail marketing campaigns, brochures, articles, press releases, white papers, Websites, newsletters, scripts, and other marketing materials clients need to sell their products and services to businesses. He also consults with clients on marketing strategy, mail order selling, and lead generation programs.

Prior to becoming an independent copywriter and consultant, Bob was advertising manager for Koch Engineering, a manufacturer of process equipment. He has also worked as a marketing communications writer for Westinghouse Defense. Bob Bly holds a B.S. in chemical engineering from the University of Rochester and has been trained as a Certified Novell Administrator (CNA). He is a member of the American Institute of Chemical Engineers and the Business Marketing Association.

Bob has appeared as a guest on dozens of TV and radio shows including MoneyTalk 1350, The Advertising Show, Bernard Meltzer, Bill Bresnan, CNBC, Winning in Business, The Small Business Advocate and CBS Hard Copy. He has been featured in major media ranging from the LA Times and Nation's Business to the New York Post and the National Enquirer.

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