

# COPYWRITING

Exploring the nature and nuances of effective copywriting for direct marketing

BY MARIE MORGANELLI, PH.D.

## The Value of Using Your Best Words



I have found there are two schools of thought when it comes to the value of copywriting in direct marketing.

In the first one, copywriting is a

valued and respected part of the creative package, and, as such, the account team expects great things to come from the writer to advance the appeal. In the second one, copy is the least important component of success for any direct mail appeal, and, as such, it is the last thing to be tested and the area to which the creative team pays the least amount of attention.

As writers, our job is the same either way. We consider the appeal and the audience(s), and we use our best words to

the right voice every time and presenting that voice in a way that is readable and accessible is always my goal.

And it should be yours, too.

Here are six steps you can use to achieve that goal.

### 1. Read Everything You Can About the Client

Make sure to read every bit of the client's website and watch any videos posted on it. Do a web search to find any mentions of the client in the news. Even though the focus of the campaign may be very specific, taking a broad approach to get to know the client will provide a platform from which to write. It's not unlike an actor writing a character sketch; it is full of details that may never make it into the dialogue, but that inform every minute of his or her performance.

It also helps when the agency has previous packages or a style sheet to share, so you know if a particular client always uses oxford commas, or another always wants the organization's name written out and not abbreviated. Knowing these details

personal details from the material provided by the agency's creative team. I try to put myself in the shoes of the donor.

### 3. Let Yourself Write Badly

This step is the most important one. No one writes pure brilliance on the first go. If anyone tells you otherwise, don't believe him or her.

In allowing yourself to write badly, you'll let go of the fear that you won't do right by the client or the agency. Remind yourself that you know what you are doing, you were hired for a reason and it's OK to just write.

### 4. Put the Work Aside

Do something else. Maybe work on another project, go for a walk or binge-watch "Mad Men" on Netflix. A perfect direct mail letter is not written in a day.

### 5. Sit Down and Type Up the Bad First Draft

Edit as you go or when you're finished. Print it out. Read it out loud. (Yes, out loud.) Edit some more. You may realize you need more information about that aspect of the charity's mission or this aspect of the current appeal. Put the work aside again and come back to it later.

### 6. Never Forget to Put Yourself in the Donors' Shoes

Through all of this, the goal is to use the best, most effective wording to make the tenuous connection between client and donor feel concrete. The agency, client and donor will read your work and, hopefully, be affected by it in a meaningful, action-oriented way.

Approaching your task through the angles of preparedness and creativity, as well as remembering that each of these connections—from package concept to roll out to acknowledgment—are crucial for connecting donor to cause, are key in cultivating donors for life.

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inspire, motivate and call to action. At the end of the day, whether we are a key part of the creative process or simply one cog in a part of a much bigger mail plan, our voice needs to blend with the voice of the client.

With this in mind, it might be easy to think that we are "just" the writers—we put some words on a page and call it a day. However, as professionals, we know that improving donor relations and motivating each client's donors to open their wallets and their hearts is the responsibility of each member of the creative team, including, and especially, the writer.

I know that the way I craft the client's message matters. I know that, ultimately, it is my unique job to help the client's message come alive in a way that is urgent, proud, excited, respectable, even desperate—often all at once. Finding just

up front even helps save time for the account staff later, because they won't have to go through and edit those details.

### 2. Brainstorm

Do what works for you. Use pen and paper, or open a new Word document. Sit outside if the weather is nice. It doesn't really matter if you have your notes on hand, because at this point you should have a good feel for the voice of the client. From your research, you'll know if the client wants its messaging to be more urgent or informative or something in between; how it represents itself to its donors; and what type of appeal the agency is asking for, so you should feel ready to start writing.

My brainstorming typically looks a lot like a finished letter. I have a beginning, middle and end. I try to pull out quotes or other