

THE RATIONALE FOR PROFESSIONAL COPYWRITING

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he written word plays an important role in communications. There is nothing more effective in informing, persuading, and motivating. Today, as in the past and into the foreseeable future, effective visual communication not only requires eye-arresting design and graphics (layout), it also requires well-crafted words (copy). Anything less wastes money—it provides only half the bang for the buck.

Today, new technologies and media make the process of generating copy easier than ever. But *Creative Business* studies show that progress can come at a high price for those not careful. Because of the ease, and because we live in a world where the emphasis is on speed and visuals, many of us tend to overlook and minimize the importance of well-written words.

Next time you're tempted to cut costs or save time by giving short shrift to copy development, consider the following.

BENEFITS TO ORGANIZATIONS

An organization opting for outside, professional writing help can look forward to several benefits seldom obtained when writing is handled internally.

No strain on resources.

Good writing is labor intensive and time-consuming. There are no shortcuts. Developing copy internally often requires assigning the task to an employee who either gives it low priority, or whose regular work suffers in the process.

Tighter control. It's always easier to assign tough deadlines, be honestly critical, and make changes to work done outside than to work that was done in-house. There are no personal sensitivities, office politics, or organizational bureaucracies to consider.

True objectivity. It is difficult, if not impossible, to uncover unique characteristics and write objectively about things that are familiar. Only an outsider will be impartial, feel free to probe, ask dumb questions, and play the devil's advocate—all necessary to the development of powerful, persuasive copy.

More relevant experience. It isn't necessary to have intimate knowledge of a product or service to write knowledgeably about it. A good, smart writer can learn more than enough in a few meetings. Much more important is that an outside writer will bring to a freshness and perspective to an assignment that can only come from the diverse experience of meeting a variety of communication challenges.

Better results. Everyone can write. Some can even write well. But few can write as well—as quickly and persuasively—as a professional who makes his or her living at it. Practice does, indeed, make (close to) perfect. So why settle for second best on your materials?

BENEFITS TO GRAPHIC DESIGNERS

The best materials are always developed by a team—designer and writer working together in harmony. There are also some very practical working benefits in addition to the enhanced creativity that ensues from such a partnership.

Fact gathering. Writing about a product or service usually requires more interviews, facts, and detail than does design. When a writer is involved early on and shares information, it eliminates the need for some designer/client meetings, saving both time and cost.

Organization and outlining. For most copy-heavy projects (brochures, annual reports, etc.) it is difficult to do good design without first having a copy structure. An outline of the story to be told, including headlines and major breaks, makes designing easier and enhances any layout.

Detail checking. By training, writers are sensitive to different details than designers. Having a pair of eyes looking for bad copy breaks, inappropriate captions, and dropped heads reduces the possibility of embarrassing errors.

SMALL ADDITIONAL COST

Except for the very smallest of jobs, creative fees are always a small fraction of total costs. The incremental difference between having professional, outside writing or not will typically only increase costs from 5% to 10% on a small brochure or ad, or less than 1% on an annual report or several-page Web site. And the difference between a good writer and a mediocre one is even less.

As for a cost comparison of in-house versus outside writing, when the true costs of internal preparation—salaries, overhead, lost productivity, etc.—are added up, outside writing nearly always costs less, not more.

In summary, professional writing is an extraordinarily small investment with a potentially big payoff in increased efficiency and effectiveness.

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