





Don't Skimp on Professional Writing

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As the client reviewed our estimate for their new website, they had no problem with the numbers for the design, the hosting, or the programming. But they didn't understand why we recommended they should pay for writing. Couldn't they just do that part themselves?

Well, yes, they could. But we didn't think they should. It's a conversation we've had with many clients over the years about many different types of projects. We believe bringing a professional writer into the process achieves an entirely different level of quality, impression, and effectiveness with nearly every type of project. And when clients have followed our advice, they've recognized the value the writer brought. We've never had to make the argument a second time.

One reason clients are willing to pay for things like design and programming is that most lack the skills and knowledge to perform them. But nearly everyone believes they can write. After all, they made it through high school and college, and usually received decent grades on their papers. How hard can it be to write about something they know well, such as their company or its products?

In answering that, there are a pair of considerations. First, the kind of writing that goes into successful websites, advertising, and collateral material differs significantly from the kind of writing that takes place in a classroom. It's not expository, it's persuasive. Its job isn't to convince the reader that a section of a novel symbolizes something -- it's designed to inform prospects and customers about what they need to know and then convince them to take action. It's more about sales and psychology than grammar and structure. An experienced copywriter is essentially a highly successful salesperson.

The second consideration is that while you may know your company and what you offer better than anyone else, effective copywriting isn't about you. It's about the people who need what you have and what's important to them. A skilled copywriter will look at your product and service through the audience's eyes. Instead of focusing on the features you believe make your product superior, they'll focus on the benefits those features bring to your customers.

That second point is key. All too often, companies try to promote their products and services by trumpeting what's important to them or what they see as differentiators. But what's important to customers and prospects is often very different. A professional copywriter will ask the "what's in it for me?" question that focuses on why people choose one supplier over another. Copywriters will also translate your internal language and jargon into something your audience will actually understand.

In addition, professional writers bring precision and economy to language. By that, I mean they choose the words that are most effective in communicating your message and keeping it as concise as possible. While that's always been important, it's even more critical today, when most people are so busy that they lack the time or desire to read something lengthy. They want to know what's important and they need to know right away. They should be able to glance at your ad and immediately understand the most important takeaway.

Professionals also know how to capture your company's unique voice and weave it consistently through all of your marketing and advertising efforts. Just as you need to make sure your graphic identity is consistent, your words all need to sound as though they come from a single source. That consistency helps customers and prospects understand who you are and what makes you different.

Finally, professional writers are less likely to make the kind of mistakes that might inadvertently embarrass your company. Well-meaning employees may mix up words or use a word they think is correct but that actually sends a different meaning -- like the law firm whose ad mentioned its "meditation" services when they clearly meant "mediation." If they can't spell correctly, should you trust them with your company's critical legal matters?

Marketing and advertising agencies typically work with multiple writers, because they recognize that each has different skills and strengths. Why is that important to you? An agency can match your company and your project with the writer whose background and style will do the best job of delivering your company's unique messages.

If it's important that your company deliver its messages consistently, efficiently, and accurately, the slight extra investment to involve a professional writer will deliver even more value than you realize.

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