

## 10 Copywriting Sins That Can Cost You Your Client

When you hand in your work to a client, how would you rate it for "perfection"? A, B, C, D, or F? Or would it be "E" for Excellent?

Now none of us are perfect (I know you could nail me for imperfections if you scrutinized my newsletters dating back to 2003)... But I still hope you said "E."

That's because if you want to work with the highest quality clients, your work had better be highest quality too. The work that comes out of a marketing department is expected by management - and customers and prospects - to be *flawless*. Anything less damages credibility. A lot.

After six years working with copywriters, showing them how to put their marketing together to get the quality clients, I've seen copywriting and formatting errors that come up over and over again. Each of these errors would cause a decision-maker to pause at best, and pass you by at worst.

And if you do get the client and hand in copy with these errors, you might not see them again.

You see, marketing directors, creative directors, publishers, and others who must process your work don't want to be *editors*. That's not their job. So when you hand in work, make sure it's flawless, and keep a keen eye to these *way* too common mistakes:

**Copywriting Sin #1:** Not capitalizing "Internet." Internet is a proper noun and as such, should always be capitalized.

**Copywriting Sin #2:** Putting two spaces at the end of a sentence. This copywriting rule comes from the world of print, where extra spaces can add a page to a sales letter, or boost a brochure up in size. The extra cost in paper, printing and postage is obvious.

**Copywriting Sin #3:** Bolding punctuation. When you bold a word or a phrase, you're putting emphasis on the idea conveyed by that word or phrase. When you bold the punctuation at the end of the sentence, what are you emphasizing? Bolding periods, exclamation points, semi-colons and other punctuation serves to distract, and we never want to distract our readers!

**Copywriting Sin #4:** Bad headline stacking. For any headline or subhead of any length, there is a natural break between phrases that you can hear with your inner ear. Listen to the cadence in this headline, from a magalog I just received:

**The truth about omega-3 fish oil  
that most vitamin companies  
don't want you to know about.**

Now listen to the cadence in the same headline with bad stacking:

**The truth about omega-3 fish oil that most  
vitamin companies don't want you to know  
about.**

I see stacking like this all the time from my students. Are you doing the same thing? To test cadence, and develop an inner ear for where the natural breaks should be, simply recite the copy out loud.

**Copywriting Sin #5:** Putting a period at the end of a headline. (Notice this sin in the headline above?) Periods tell us to STOP. But in copywriting we want people to keep *moving* through the copy. Exclamation points, question marks, ellipses... these are ok in headlines if they do the work you want them to do. But not periods.

**Copywriting Sin #6:** Thinking you always need a headline on sales letters. Headlines are powerful. But sometimes they're not necessary. If your lead-in grabs 'em by the throat and doesn't let go, a headline might be overkill.

The nature of the target audience could be a factor as well. For instance, if you're targeting CEOs of major corporations, a headline on your sales letter screams "MARKETING!". With this group, and some others - like engineers - subtlety is the watchword.

**Copywriting Sin #7:** Ending any page of a sales letter (except the final page), with a complete sentence. NO NO NO! You want to *draaag* them into the next page by creating a sentence with a high curiosity quotient and ellipses, so they have to go to the next page to finish the sentence.

Not doing this makes you look like a novice. Some time ago journalists discovered this technique to keep you moving through the paper. Notice it the next time you read your daily!

**Copywriting Sin #8:** In a sales letter, not adding a P.S. The value of a P.S. is so high that omitting it makes you look like you started your copywriting career last week. People read the P.S. It's potent real estate and that's why the offer is often restated there. Are there exceptions? Sure, but 95.75 percent of the time you'll want that P.S.

**Copywriting Sin #9:** No thought to personalization. As a copywriter, you should expect to personalize every piece you write, unless it's obviously impossible (as in landing pages and print ads).

Response rates are MUCH higher with personalization. It's one of the first things a recipient looks for. They're thinking, "Does this person know my name?" If you sent your prospecting letter to "Dear Marketing Director," the obvious answer is "no." And into the trash your letter goes.

**Copywriting Sin #10:** This is the Big Kahuna. Consistency! Clients HATE inconsistencies! It forces them to become proofreaders. This one is a real job killer.

Get yourself your one resource that you *always* refer to and make it your bible. I recommend the one journalists use, **The Chicago Manual of Style**. You can pick one up at Amazon. Here's the link for your convenience: <http://is.gd/1hq5S>

The most common inconsistencies I see are 1) using two **en** dashes together (--) to create the longer **em** dash (-); either do one or the other but do it consistently. And 2) having no spaces or some spaces around the ellipse. Such as this... Or this ...  
One or the other please.

And a BONUS...

**Copywriting Sin #11:** Rarely does anyone get this one right! Ensure vs. insure. Here's the difference:

**Ensure:** To make sure, certain, or safe

Example: To ensure my family's safety, I have installed an alarm system.

**Insure:** To provide or obtain insurance on or for

Example: I will insure my home with additional fire and flood policies.

Chris Marlow

**Achieving Goals Through Trusted Advice™**

Phone: 760-340-2045

Fax: 760-406-6200

Email: [chrismarlow@getgreatclients.com](mailto:chrismarlow@getgreatclients.com)

Member of the [Trusted Advisor's Alliance](#)

## ABOUT CHRIS MARLOW

Chris Marlow is the original copywriters coach since 2003, bringing copywriters into the world of high quality clients, high pay, and maximum career satisfaction. Chris also helps copywriters achieve thought-leader status in their niche markets, and create new revenue streams with information products. For more information, follow these links: [www.thecopywriterscoach.com](http://www.thecopywriterscoach.com), [www.chrismarlow.com](http://www.chrismarlow.com)