How to Be a Copywriting Genius: The Brilliantly Sneaky Trick You Must Learn

Sonia Simone



Are your readers doing what you want them to do? Are they clicking through to your links, ordering your eBook or signing up for your opt-in? If not, you need to learn a master craftsman's copywriting secret.

This technique acts like a remote control to get your readers to take action. Press this "magic button" and you'll see your results improve dramatically.

The secret, masters-only technique to compelling your readers to act is to . . .

. . . . ask them.

Annoyed? Think I'm pulling your leg? There's nothing magical or tricky to getting someone to do something just by asking them, right? That's completely obvious.

And most copy doesn't do it.

Which is why most copy gets weak results.

Persuasive writing needs a strong call to action

The advice to "always ask them" has been turned into a heroic-sounding marketing term called the *call to action*, as if trumpets were sounding and prospects were marching off to war just because you inserted a couple of words at the end of your copy.

The term might sound a little bombastic. But the simple fact is, once you've gained your reader's attention (with a great headline and a strong hook) and presented all the benefits she'll get by taking the action you want, you still have one more hoop to jump through.

You need to *tell your reader exactly what to do, how to do it, and that you want her to do it right now.*

Make it specific

The late copywriting master Gary Halbert liked to include seemingly insane levels of detail in his calls to action.

His copy would end with something like, "Call (specific 800 number). You'll talk with a woman named Robin in a blue sweater who will ask you, *Would you like the large size or the jumbo?*. Tell her you want the jumbo. She'll ask you for your mailing address where you can receive packages, and you'll give it to her." He goes on and on like that for quite some time.

For the beginning copywriter, it feels like a strange, awkward technique that's going to "look weird." But for the *reader*, in the context of taking action that might cost some money, time or inconvenience, this level of detail

creates a solid, comfortable understanding of what to do next and what to expect.

If you want your reader to take action, use highly specific language with clear, concrete details. Don't leave any question about what you want to see happen. And don't be afraid to be a little "too obvious."

Your readers are not dumb

As you're writing, you'll think you have made yourself stupidly clear. You spent 14 hours on that lengthy article describing your fascinating new product. You followed up with a 12-part series on your blog and an autoresponder sequence of 20 emails.

To you, any moron can see what to do next–your reader should click through to that PayPal button and order your new work of genius.

The reality isn't very appealing for the writer.

The fact is, Ron Reader found one of your posts (maybe #3 out of that carefully planned series of 12) on StumbleUpon and spent 30 seconds skimming the subheads. He read the first sentence twice because he thought it was funny, then he skipped down and read part of the last paragraph.

Then you got lucky–instead of Ron hitting "Stumble" again, Ron's boss came up behind the cube and Ron had to think fast. He brought up a spreadsheet to look like he was working. An hour later, Ron's cousin sent another link to YouTube, and Ron spent 20 minutes surfing videos of dogs drinking beer. Then he wrapped up that really overdue report while eating a bag of Fritos and catching up on email.

Four minutes before he shut down for the day, Ron noticed your post again, so he read your first paragraph and one of the sections that looked kind of interesting.

Your readers are not dumb. But they *do* have a lot of other things competing for their attention. So no, Ron Reader is not going to know what to do next unless you spell it out with painful clarity, and probably tie a giant red ribbon on it while you're at it.

Incidentally, this is why links that say "click here," even though they make Web usability pundits cringe, test better than links that don't. It might be hard to believe, but no, many hurried and distracted users don't instantly get that they are supposed to *click here*. You have to tell them.

Being clear isn't the same as talking down to your reader

Granddaddy copywriter John Caples wrote about this very point way back in 1932. When you see the word "ad," substitute *post* or *landing page* or *Web copy.* All persuasive writing is built on the same foundations.

> *Don't make ads simple because you think people are low in intelligence. Some are smart and some are not smart. The point is that people are thinking about other things when they see your ad. Your ad does not get their full attention or intelligence. Your ad gets only a fraction of their intelligence . . . . People won't study your ad carefully. They can't be bothered. And so you have to make your ads simple.*