5 Basic Rules of Copywriting

Whether they possess a natural gift or a studied skill, all writers who have polished their craft follow the same basic rules when drafting copy for sales and marketing materials. The best "writing" begins before a single word hits the page. While some of the "rules" are bent when writing for e-communications, the following should be considered when writing for print.

1. **Write to your audience.** Before putting pen to paper (or your fingertips to keyboard), make sure you know your audience. That means research. Who's your target? Get in his shoes, figuratively speaking, and "know" what makes him tick. Once you have a clear sense of who you are talking to, adopt a conversational style. And always speak your reader's language. It's OK to use jargon - as long as it will be understood. Still stuck? If it helps, picture an individual rather than endless, shapeless faces. And write only to him...or her.

2. **Keep it simple.** Use short sentences and short words. This is not the time to try to dazzle your reader with your vocabulary. Avoid trying to be "clever" and your copy will be smart. The simpler the message, the better it is understood.

3. **Focus on benefits.** The natural inclination is to go on about features of your product, service or company. In a word: don't. Your customers want to know how your product is going to improve their lives; not about its construction, the dimensions or what it means to your company. Start with the universally sought-after benefits: saving time and money.

4. **Be as long or as short as you need.** Some studies show that long copy does a better job of selling. Be sure to break up long copy, however, with headlines, subheads, graphics and pull quotes. Short sentences are best. Even when you have lots to say.

5. **Proofread every time.** Nothing kills killer copy faster than a typo. It says you pay no attention to the details. That you're sloppy. And careless. Build proofreading into your copywriting process. And have more than one set of eyes ready to review.