

Eoghan Nolan

10 ways to get the best from your copywriter.



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Wait - what is a copywriter?

The copywriter is the specialist member of an advertising or creative communications team responsible for words. He or she has a practised facility for pithiness; articulating complex thoughts or strategies in concise, accessible, impactful, engaging and memorable form. Their raw material is salient fact and their objective is to impart information, raise awareness or make a sale.

At their least, a copywriter can use language like crampons on a rock face, letting brands gain purchase in the mind of the consumer.

At their best, a copywriter can transform the way people think about not only the brand on offer, but even the world around them.

Think about some advertising from the past. You'll probably find it's the words you remember. We recall lines and slogans from old ads while we couldn't pick out the cast from a line-up or draw the logo at gunpoint. Language and concept is what stays with us.



1. Find a good copywriter.

Despite all the hullabaloo of the wasteful pitching system some still indulge in, very little time is really spent in vetting the pedigree of the creative team.

In fact, most clients spend considerably more energy scrutinising the cost of the work than in getting to know the team that will be the voice of their brand.

Yet a good copywriter can transform your business and bring fame and prosperity, while poor advertising may barely keep your brand on a plateau.

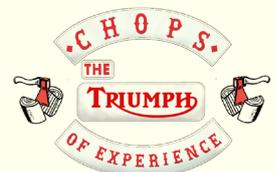
2. A quick way to find a good copywriter.

1. **Make a note of some ads you like.**
2. **Identify the copywriter responsible.**
3. **Seek them out and give them your business.**
4. **Feed them well.**
5. **Keep them close.**

3. Put time into your brief.

Briefs are designed to concentrate the minds of both client and copywriter.

A brief enables complete understanding of the task in hand while outlining only what is essential to communicate. **There should be nothing expected from the communication that is not in the brief and nothing in the brief that is not relevant.**



4. Focus.

The brief is the only benchmark and it should be... brief.

Mandatory inclusions (compliance, call-to-action etc.) should all be included from the get-go to avoid faffing about later on. The brief is vital for putting the task into focus, simultaneously improving the communication while saving time and money.

If you don't have time to write a comprehensive brief, don't work with a copywriter until you do.

Time spent getting the brief right is time saved in the creative development phase, so apart from good sense, it's good business.

5. Belly flip.

Talk through your competitors' advertising with your copywriter, and share work you like from any sector.

It's right to be excited.

One client used to say he wanted to feel his belly flip when the concept was revealed. While that amused us, we also knew he was absolutely right – the work should always be challenging, exciting, different and maybe even a little scary. Neither client nor creative agency can afford bland advertising.



6. Be honest.

Your brief should be genuine and disclosing.

Don't describe your product or service in overblown terms.

If you're number three in your sector for a reason, admit it.

If you're never going to be number one, say it.

If people prefer a rival company's product, be realistic and revealing about the reason.

[For a copywriter, truth is the grit around which the pearl forms.](#)

Besides, every mid-ranking, not-so-great product likes to throw shapes about being better than they are. Only the best brands respect the intelligence of their consumers enough to be open and real.

7. Allow time.

Good things take time. It's not because a copywriter can't bang something out in a day (they can and do, sadly).

In fact, brand owners routinely take longer to mull over a concept than they allowed for its creation in the first place.

A committed copywriter rarely finishes.

Which is to say that they will be enhancing an idea or refining copy with every pass. Who doesn't want them to do that?

Advertising that stands the test of time is generally advertising that was given time in the first place.



8. Keep the process sensible.

Decide who has power of approval over the copywriter's work and make sure she, he or they are at every step of the process.

If necessary, postpone a meeting until the relevant people are available.

Nothing throws out creative development quicker than a lack of continuity client-side; it prevents process from being linear and inevitably means having to back-track or explain decisions made previously by the team. It's time and money wasted and can impact the quality of the response.

9. Respect the final presentation.

When a copywriter gets to that all-important final presentation, it's the summation of your investment and theirs; so give it the time it needs. Again, whenever possible make sure all decision-makers are present... and make a decision. Unless there is a major obstacle to doing so, get it straight from the horse's mouth; ask the copywriter to present in person even if it has to be in an airport lounge. Ask them how much time they will need and don't bring anyone who wasn't previously involved.

Turn off your phones and pay attention.

After all, this could transform your business.



10. Afterwards.

Following the presentation, be positive, thank everyone and then go and think about what you've seen. Don't shop the work around or canvass views from people who don't know the brief, including your loved ones.

Be wary of any response based on fear or timidity.

Good creative work is a solution that can only be judged in relation to the definition of the problem contained in the brief.

Great creative work relies on decisive champions.

Author's Postscript

These guidelines are sadly, to quote Hamlet: '*a custom more honoured in the breach than the observance*'.

Yet observing them should make for more engaging and effective copy and communications, a happier and more interesting working relationship and a saving of time and money.



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Eoghan Nolan is an award-winning copywriter. He has been creative director of McCann, BBDO Dublin and Leo Burnett, founding Brand Artillery and artillerybrand.com along the way.

Eoghan lectured in copywriting at the Dublin Institute of Technology and on the Evolution of Advertising in Insec U London. His podcast, A Slightly Unreasonable Point of View, can be heard on RTE Lyric FM.

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