

## 9 Questions for Better Copy Outcomes *The Answers Your Copywriter Needs...Now*

As easy as it may seem to shoot an email off to your copywriter of choice and receive an on-target, well-written piece of copy in return, the truth is that great copy is a little harder to come by.

You can go a long way toward assuring a successful project by giving that copywriter the information he or she needs to craft effective marketing prose.

Here are nine questions you should be prepared to answer for your writer when it's time to launch your next copy project:

### 1. What are we really selling?

This classic sales question cuts neatly through much of the clutter when it comes to marketing. And answering it lets both you and your writer know whether there's a story that can be told rather than simply a service or product to be sold. Telling a story makes it much easier to connect with your target...and for your target to feel the love in return.

### 2. Who is the audience for this project?

Of course, your copywriter should know whether a project is B2B or B2C. But you should also differentiate between efforts aimed at new customer acquisition versus current accounts, and whether you're speaking to a niche audience or a general one. Either way, these distinctions will affect the way your copywriter approaches

your project, so you should be clear about to whom you're talking and their level of familiarity with your organization and what you're selling.

### 3. What source material exists?

At the very least, you should hand over a creative brief that lists all your thoughts and expectations. Beyond the brief, try to gather as much source information as possible for your writer — internal research, sales letters, the previous version of the piece if you're updating existing materials, competitors' websites, and any industry background if appropriate.

### 4. What's your unique selling proposition?

Your copywriter may know who you are and what you do, but what makes you stand out from the crowd? Give some thought to your competitive strengths and weaknesses, and your natural position in the market — are you generally perceived as the established thought leader, the young upstart, the value alternative, or the premium blend?

### 5. What tone is appropriate for this audience?

Every copywriter has a natural style, but seasoned scribes can match the "voice" required for your particular project. A B2B piece may need professional jargon with a lot of research to back up your claims, while a mailer sent to consumers might

have a more emotional appeal using accessible, casual language.

*(cont'd on p. 3)*

## Mapping Out a Route to Creative Greatness

Trying to write some copy and stuck in a creative rut? Try mind mapping.

Every copywriter struggles with finding new ways of looking at things. It may be exploring a new concept or putting information together in a way that's easier to understand, but thinking creatively can sometimes be a struggle.

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## The Writer's Toolbox

### Feeling repetitive? Now you'll know for sure.

It happens to the best of us. Sometimes we fall into a writing pattern and unconsciously repeat the same word — usually a modifier or transitional phrase — over and over without noticing. Now, there's WordCounter.com to the rescue. WordCounter ranks the most frequently used words in any document, so you know for sure whether your repetitive gene has kicked in. It automatically excludes words like "I" and "the," but you can change settings if you're worried about repeating those words, too.

### Even non-poets need a good rhyme sometime.

We all learned our iambic pentameter in high school, but that doesn't make it any easier to find a word that rhymes with "orange." (Hint: Nothing rhymes with orange.) Not only will RhymeZone.com come up with a rhyme for you, it also finds synonyms, antonyms, definitions, spelling, related words, even homophones. If RhymeZone can't find a rhyme for your word, it will make suggestions about where to find near rhymes. Except for orange, that is.

### Take the words out of someone else's mouth.

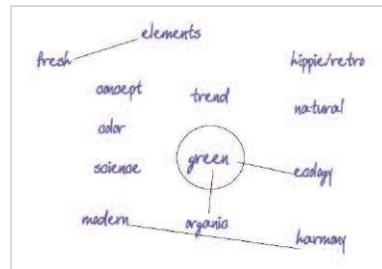
Need just the right quote as the icing for your metaphorical copy cake? If that quote continues to elude you, try ThinkExist.com. Let's say you need a quote about good fortune to promote a self-help book. Type the phrase into ThinkExist, and up pops a list of quotes (including an apt one by Goethe) for your perusal. Don't see what you need on that list? You can also search by author or scan an alphabetical list of topics for inspiration.

## Mind Mapping (from p. 1)

### What is mind mapping and how does it work?

For centuries, mind mapping has been used to enhance problem solving and brainstorming by helping the user think more visually. Think about it — when you make a list of ideas, the initial items take on an inflated sense of importance just because they happen to fall at the top. A list's linear nature unconsciously influences how we "rank" information as we scan it.

The goal of a mind map is to get your ideas out in a more democratic fashion — more of a horizontal image than a typical vertical list. Start by placing your core idea in the center of a blank page — a pad, a white board, a computer document, the format doesn't really matter. Add associated ideas or concepts, then link them via lines when you see relationships begin to form. What you end up with is an intriguing web of interconnected ideas rather than a top-to-bottom list.



For example, we often use mind mapping when developing taglines for new products (see example at left). We'll start with the product's core attribute, then branch out with terms and concepts that reflect competitive differentiators, market factors, brand promises, even related pop culture references like movies or song lyrics — anything even vaguely related that comes to mind. The mind map makes it

easy to group ideas into categories, and to spot relationships or new directions that might never have come to light via a list.

Some argue that mind mapping is superior to other creative exercises because it uses both hemispheres of the brain and appeals equally to our creative and logical sides. Whether this is a better way of brainstorming is anybody's guess. But it certainly differs from the usual approach, and doing things differently is a great way to get your creative juices flowing.

### The benefits of thinking differently

At first, the obvious advantage of mind mapping is its novelty. When you think about a task in a different way, you'll start to generate fresh ideas and see new relationships. And by thinking more visually, you can make connections between ideas that otherwise may not be apparent, which makes for a more robust result.

Another advantage of mind mapping is when working collaboratively. Getting input from other people means you can connect their ideas with yours for a richer experience. It's also helpful when you want to organize a large project with multiple layers of content.

### Giving mind mapping a whirl

From a blank sheet of paper or the nearest white board to more sophisticated online tools, mind mapping can be as low or high tech as you want to make it. The good news is that many online tools are available at no or low cost, and they are browser based, so it doesn't matter if you're on a Mac or PC.

Although there are many terrific mind mapping resources out there, of special note is mind42.com. What sets Mind 42 apart is its intuitiveness and ease of use, which can't be underestimated when you're collaborating with a group, or if you're more technical dunce than technical maven.

Give mind mapping a try on your next project. Whether you take advantage of some of the great software options or rock it old school with pen and paper, you may find yourself unlocking more creativity than you ever knew you had.

## 9 Questions (from p. 1)

The tone of the copy is often the most influential aspect of your marketing effort, so letting the copywriter know how you want your pitch to sound makes it much more likely that your voice will be heard.

### 6. What are the key features and benefits of your offering?

Although features and benefits are often confused, they're really very different. Features are qualities that describe the product or service, while benefits are what those features do for the user. For example, a computer may have a 1.2 GHz processing speed (feature), but the benefit is that it can cut your payroll processing time in half. Since selling is all about the customer, you can see how benefit statements are much more compelling for readers than bland, static product features.

### 7. What kinds of objections or sales obstacles exist for this audience?

You've most likely heard and had to overcome the common obstacles to making a sale. Acknowledging them in your copy

makes you more trustworthy, and your marketing that much more effective. Don't assume your copywriter knows the hurdles his or her effort might face — be as specific as you can on any potential pushback.

### 8. How will this copy be used?

The structure of good copy will vary depending on whether the project is online or in print, whether a brochure will be used as a direct mail piece or a leave behind, or if the piece will be used in conjunction with something else, like an existing sales or media kit. The smaller the space available to communicate an idea, the more weight each word has to pull.

### 9. What's the ultimate goal?

This is an important question because the answer will go a long way toward identifying how you'll measure the success of the project. Should this piece generate direct sales, or simply qualify new leads? Open the door to future communication or reinforce your brand positioning? Drive calls to a toll-free number or traffic to a landing page? Knowing your goals will help your writer design an appropriate call to action.

By taking some time to consider these nine questions — and sharing detailed answers with your copywriter — you'll be well on your way to copywriting that will perform to your expectations, and a solid relationship with your copywriter built on the best kind of teamwork.

Wait, what's that? Your copywriter hasn't asked you these questions lately — or any questions, for that matter? Then it might just be time to find yourself a new writer. Because a less-than-inquisitive copywriter is one who's less than effective, too.

“Imagination is everything. It is the preview of life's coming attractions.”

Albert Einstein



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#### FAHOURY INK

47 Park Avenue, Suite 203  
West Orange, NJ 07052-5500  
Phone: (973) 324-2100

Email: [compost@fahouryink.com](mailto:compost@fahouryink.com)

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## New Customized Workshops for "Accidental Copywriters"

Are you and your staff taking on more promotional writing in an effort to maximize your internal resources and keep your company in front of customers and prospects?

*Copywriting 101: Becoming a Marketing Wordsmith* is a new corporate group session designed to boost both the basic skills and comfort level of your in-house team of what we call "accidental copywriters" — those who've inherited writing responsibilities, but haven't yet had the benefit of any formal copywriting training.

In this half-day session, groups of five or more can learn the nuts and bolts of crafting targeted, benefit-oriented marketing copy — from lead-generating sales letters and direct mail promotions to compelling, keyword-rich website content. Your team will also learn the best ways to repurpose content for maximum exposure — from blogging and newsletters to SEO-boosting online articles.

The workshop also includes a gentle critique of your organization's current copy efforts, with specific, actionable suggestions for strengthening their effectiveness.

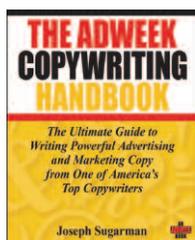
For details on bringing *Copywriting 101: Becoming a Marketing Wordsmith* to your organization, call Fahoury Ink at (973) 324-2100.



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47 Park Avenue, Suite 203  
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Welcome to the 1st Annual  
Copywriting Issue! See inside....



## The Adweek Copywriting Handbook

Joseph Sugarman  
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These days, more non-writers are taking on corporate copywriting duties in an effort to control costs. If you're among them, a great reference to keep by your side is *The Adweek Copywriting Handbook* by direct response sales legend Joe Sugarman.

Although Sugarman packs 15 axioms, three emotional principles, 10 graphic elements, 23 copy elements, and 31 psychological

triggers into 326 pages, don't be intimidated — *The Adweek Copywriting Handbook* has nuggets of wisdom for everyone from the novice to the experienced copy practitioner.

One of the best pieces of advice Sugarman delivers is to break out of what he calls "assumed constraints." With an anecdote about how massive elephants are trained to stay put simply by being chained to a peg hammered into the ground, he counsels writers to step outside their personal boundaries and not let them stand in the way of big ideas.

As for practical copywriting advice, Sugarman pays special attention to techniques like "planting seeds of curiosity." By using phrases like, "But there's more" and "Let me explain," he demonstrates how to use language that encourages readers to move forward even though the copy may be slowing down.

When it comes to an easy-to-grasp checklist for writing great copy, Sugarman delivers that, too, with steps like these:

- Become an expert on the product or service you're selling.
- Know your prospect, what he wants and what he fears.
- Write a headline and subhead that are just long enough to create curiosity.
- Write your copy without first editing yourself, then edit until it's properly written, clear, and tight.
- Incubate — let copy sit for a bit while you do something else.
- Take a final look at your copy to make those last changes.

According to Sugarman, these steps really sum up the process used by the most effective copywriters. And he's one man who should know.