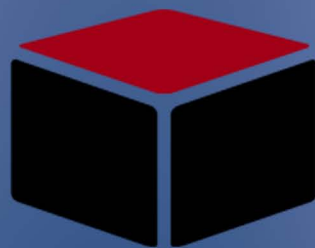


SPECIAL REPORT #3

How to Write Killer Ads and Compelling Sales Copy



Presented by
Clayton Makepeace
and *The Total Package*
www.MakepeaceTotalPackage.com

How to Write Killer Ads and Compelling Sales Copy

21 Tips, Tricks and Tactics: Key Lessons Learned from 34 Years in the Trenches

(No "Rules," Though – I Hate Rules!)

By Clayton Makepeace,

Billion Dollar Marketer, Publisher and Editor, [The Total Package](#)

Dear Business-Builder,

Sometimes, I get flummoxed.

Like a few years back -- when the president of Phillips Publishing asked me to answer questions his group publishers and marketing managers had about copywriting.

It was in the early 1990s, and Phillips' president was the legendary Bob King – a truly great man, and one of the sharpest marketing minds I have ever known.

As I remember, the first question his people asked me was, *"How do you know the difference between good sales copy and bad copy?"*

Hence, my flummoxation: These were executives with degrees in marketing from major universities -- marketing hot shots who hired copywriters every single day ... critiqued our copy and dictated changes to us -- and the one thing they wanted to know was ...

"How can I spot powerful sales copy when I see it?"

My mind reeled. I was so caught off-guard, I just blurted out the first thing that went through my mind: *"You don't know it,"* I said, *"You feel it."*

I explained that consumers almost never buy things because it is logical to do so – and that the vast majority of purchases made in this country are made because they satisfy an emotional need.

So to be great, sales copy must connect with the prospect's most powerful resident emotions – whether positive or negative – and



demonstrate how reading the copy and buying the product will fulfill or assuage those desires or fears.

That's why, I explained, instead of merely *thinking* through the writing, editing and review process, I *feel* my way through – making sure that the “tingle factor” intensifies with every passing paragraph until I literally can't wait to order.

I explained how every sales message is like a chain designed to meet the reader at the point of his need ... and then lead him, step by step, link by link, to the order form.

I showed them how the chain is only as strong as its weakest link: How the minute you lose the “tingle factor,” the reader gets bored, you lose him, and the chain breaks. How if something you say feels unbelievable to him, the chain breaks. And how if you confuse him by losing your clarity of vision, the chain breaks.

I also pointed out that, even if you make sure that every link in the chain is unbreakable, your copy is also only as strong as its *strongest* link. The more compelling each section is, the greater your response and average order will be. And here, once again, feeling my way through lets me strengthen even the strongest sections of my copy.

I thought it was a pretty good answer. I still do. In fact, if you haven't had the experience of reading your copy aloud, sensing how each passage feels to you, sensing how it's likely to feel to the prospect, I highly recommend it.

But as I watched the young gun's faces, I could tell that I had raised more questions than I answered for them. They needed something more tangible from me.

They needed a checklist – a handful of nitty-gritty, nuts-and-bolts tactics to look for.

And so, in a belated attempt to improve on my decade-old answer, allow me to offer 21 ways to spot strong copy – and to help make the ads, direct mail packages and Internet promotions you're working on bigger winners for you.

THESE ARE NOT RULES. I hate rules. But they're great “non-rules” – guidelines that have paid off for me time and time again in my 34 years in the direct response trenches – and that I'm confident will strengthen your ad copy as well ...

Non-Rule #1:
BE somebody!

We tend to be skeptical, even suspicious of information given us by a corporation. We welcome – indeed, we seek out -- advice from

qualified guides and advocates who have our best interests at heart. And we welcome advice from someone who has solved a problem that we're struggling with.

Putting a friendly and/or *highly qualified* human face on copy – and speaking in that person's voice -- will ramp up the impact of your sales messages by an order of magnitude.

Non-Rule #2:

Address your prospect directly.

Here, you actually get two maxims for the price of one:

A) Talk *to* your reader: Instead of talking about how “we” age ... how “we” encounter various health problems, talk to the reader about *her* life ... *her* future ... and most importantly, her feelings.

Use the word “YOU” as often as is humanly possible throughout your text. Remember: Your prospect really couldn't give a flip about you, your company, your product or anything else. The prospect is interested in *the* prospect!

B) Talk about the reader: Yes, it's true that x million Americans have heart attacks each year. But saying it that way, you're not talking about her; you're talking about x million other folks.

Find ways to personalize these kinds of statistics: “As an American over age 40, your chances are one in x of having a heart attack this year.” Wow. *Now, you've got my attention!*

Non-Rule #3:

Be personal.

I often begin by closing my eyes and imagining that I'm talking to a friend about the subject at hand. How would I begin the conversation? What would I say? What would he say? What would I say back?

I would not refer to myself in the plural: “We want to help you ...” I'd say, “Here – let me help you ...”

Non-Rule #4:

Identify with your prospect.

Gary Bencivenga did this beautifully with his “Why we investors are fed up ...” deck in his all-time classic “Lies, Lies, Lies!” package. Instantly, in the prospect's mind, the person addressing him was transformed from a salesman into “a regular guy” -- someone just like him.

Tell the reader what you have in common. Let him know that you empathize: You've been there. Reveal a non-fatal weakness or a petty frustration that the two of you might share. Anything that puts you on the reader's level will endear him to you and engender trust between you.

Non-Rule #5:
Put a face on the enemy.

Why has the reader failed to solve this problem or fulfill this desire? Were all the other products he's tried ineffective? Were the "experts" who gave him advice wrong? Is someone intentionally using him?

This is a rich emotional vein – so mine it! But instead of droning on about how unfair banks are, personalize it. Talk about how greedy bankers do this or that *to the reader*. Or about how callous drug company execs trick his doctor into prescribing costly and dangerous things that often don't work.

Non-Rule #6:
Prove every point.

Never ask your reader to accept any claim at face value. Always include proof elements that suspend his disbelief with every claim. Best credibility devices could include:

- 1) Study data from respected sources
- 2) Expert testimonials
- 3) User testimonials
- 4) Statements that support your point from a major periodical – The New York Times, Wall Street Journal, etc.

Non-Rule #7:
Don't fear the occasional obvious overstatement.

No, I'm not suggesting that you should exaggerate when describing what your product does. But I often use an obvious over-the-top phrase to demonstrate how intensely my client feels about a particular point.

Once in a health promotion, for example, I wrote:

"Some surgeons are so greedy, they'll gladly cut a hole right through you – *just to get to your wallet!*"

Was it true? Who knows? No, I didn't have a story about a surgeon who had literally cut through a patient to reach his wallet in my substantiation files. I did know, however, that many of my readers had had hysterectomies, mastectomies and other surgical procedures that

were later determined to be unnecessary – and that line got every one of them emotionally involved and on my side.

Non-Rule #8:

Speak colloquially.

I try to speak to my prospects as they're used to being spoken to. Yes, that means I often dangle my participles and other parts (of speech). So what? I'm trying to *communicate* here – not trying to pass an English exam.

To mock the sticklers who were constantly correcting his prepared speeches, Winston Churchill once declared, "A dangling participle is something up with which I will not put." Pretty much says it all ...

Non-Rule #9:

All jargon is NOT evil!

Many coaches say you should avoid technical terms and industry jargon altogether. Baloney.

The selective use of jargon comes in handy lots of times when I'm writing -- like ...

A) When the jargon's meaning is familiar to the reader – especially investors and medical patients -- I'm respecting his intelligence; speaking a language he understands and is comfortable with.

B) When the jargon is being spoken – sparingly – by an expert, it demonstrates the expert's, well ... expertise. We expect doctors to be proficient in the use of medical jargon and brokers to use investment terminology. If the term is obscure though, I'll include a quick explanation and then move on.

Non-Rule #10:

Figures of speech are wonderful!

Early on, I was told to avoid clichés, sayings, analogies, aphorisms, proverbs, adages and so on. *But why?* If you had a face-to-face conversation with your prospect wouldn't you hear *tons* of these figures of speech?

Doesn't the use of these favorite sayings instantly say, "Hey – I'm not a salesman; I'm just like you!"? Don't they get your prospect smiling? And don't most of them instantly communicate something that it would otherwise take us a sentence or more?

If a picture is worth one thousand words, a good figure of speech should be worth at least one hundred. So go ahead: Experiment. If a figure of speech helps you communicate faster or drive a point home

harder – and if you're absolutely sure that its meaning will be instantly grasped by your prospect – go for it!

Of course, writing copy that's just one cliché after another might be a slippery slope. Your client may even say that your promo is a basket case. That would be a close shave! You might end up feeling as dumb as a bag of hammers.

But on the other hand, choosing the right spots to communicate quickly with an idiom could turn out to be your bread and butter. Who knows? Maybe you'll wind up richer than Midas!

Rule #11:

**Put the 75 most powerful words and phrases
in the English language to work for you.**

Use these freely (no charge) when crafting headlines, subheads, and throughout your copy:

Amazing

Astonishing

Astounding

Announcing

Appalling

At Last

Bargain

Bonus

Breakthrough

Charter

Comfortable

Discount

Discover

Discovery

Easy

Effortless

Exclusive

Fearless

First Time Ever

Forever

Free

Gift
Guaranteed
How to...
How I ...
Hurry
Immediate
Improved
Inevitable
Instantly
Intense
Introducing
It's here
Just Arrived
Last Chance
Limited
Locked-In
Miracle
Money
Never Before
Nothing To Lose
New
Now
Opportunity
Painless
Premium
Prestigious
Priority
Promise
Proven
Quick
Revolutionary
Right Away
Rush

Sale
Save
Savings
Scandalous
Secret
Send No Money
Sensation
Simple
Special
Shocking
Steal
Surprising
The Truth About...
Today
Unique
Valuable
Why
Win
Windfall
Yes
And of course, the all-time award-winner ...
YOU!

Another thing: Some words and phrases are wimps. The limp-wristed, namby-pambies of the writing universe. "Can" ... "could" ... "should" ... "might" ... "may" ... "ought to" ... "seeks to" ... "has the potential to" ... "In my opinion" ... and all the rest of these sissies should be banned from your copy whenever necessary.

Tell your prospect what your product will do. If the legal beagle or compliance officer complains, make a phone call and haggle.

Example:

YOU WRITE: "These investments are guaranteed to soar when interest rates rise."

COMPLIANCE VERSION: "These investments could possibly have the potential to soar when interest rates rise – maybe."

COMPROMISE: "These investments have the power to soar when

interest rates rise.”

Non-Rule #12:
Squint.

Squinting makes the individual letters and words indecipherable and I’m left with just the pattern the paragraphs make on the page.

As I study the page, I’m asking myself, “At first glance, does this feel easy-to-read and inviting? Or is it covered with long, dense paragraphs that will only discourage my reader?”

Then I ...

- Jump in and break long paragraphs into shorter ones – even one-line paragraphs when I can ...
- Identify spots where the thing is crying out for a break – a sidebar or indented paragraph, for example – and then work them in ...
- Look for opportunities to turn a long block of copy into a string of pearls (like these).

I look for a series of benefits, steps in a procedure or other copy points that I can precede with bullets, numbers, letters, etc.

You can present horrifying alternatives ...

- **Ages your body:** Fluoride has been shown to damage your chromosomes and block the enzymes needed to repair your DNA.
- **Poisons your brain:** Laboratory subjects given tiny doses of fluoride for a year showed an increased uptake of aluminum in the brain, and the formation of beta amyloid deposits which are characteristic of Alzheimer’s disease.

And five Chinese studies have documented a lowering of IQ in children exposed to fluoride!

... Or, billboard benefits, as with these fascinations from a recent promotion for Your Money Report:

- **The #1 Secret of Landlords Who Get RICH:** Doing this one thing can mean the difference between fat profits and a devastating loss! Page xx
- **Flipping For A Fortune? WATCH OUT!** Ingenious strategy lets you make a bundle without ever owning a single property. BUT, it could also get you sued – or worse! Essential advice: Page xx
- **Beware of These “Landlord Landmines!”** 3 easy ways to

sidestep costly landlord/tenant traps. Page xx

... Or, create a label. This series, "7 Guilty Secrets Drug Companies Do NOT Want You To Know" was also touted on the cover of the piece as a reason to read the piece:

FACT #1: Drug Companies Kill Tens of Thousands Each Year: Many of today's most-often prescribed medications are not only useless, but extremely dangerous – crippling and killing as many Americans each year as died in the 18 years of the Vietnam war.

FACT #2: They Do It *Knowingly* -- For Money: The ultra-rich U.S. drug industry – the single most profitable businesses in America – is guilty of using bogus research, distorted reporting, and bald-faced lies to push deadly and ineffective drugs onto unsuspecting doctors and patients.

Non-Rule #13:

Go for precision and power.

A lot of experts say you should use short words. Write as if the prospect is an eighth-grader.

Some anal-retentive rule addicts have even gone so far as to instruct students to add up all the letters in each paragraph and divide by the number of words, and make sure that the average word is no more than five letters long!

Utter nonsense!

Here's what I do ...

- If a long word means precisely the same thing and carries the same emotional coloring as a shorter word, I'll go with the shorter word.

I can't stand to read or even talk to people who use longer words when shorter ones will do just fine: Who say "facilitate" when all they mean is "help" or "ease" ... "compensate" when they mean "pay" ... "Individual" when they mean a "guy" or a "gal" or "person" ... or "sufficient" when they mean "*enough!*"

Nine times out of ten, I've found that people who write or talk like that are trying to hide something. Like massive insecurities. Or the fact that they have no idea what they're talking about.

To quote William Zinsser's advice in his classic, *On Writing Well*:

"Beware, then, of the long word that is no better than the short word: 'numerous' (many), 'facilitate' (ease), 'individual' (man or woman), 'remainder' (rest), 'initial' (first), 'implement' (do),

'sufficient' (enough), 'attempt' (try), 'referred to as' (called), and hundreds more."

- But if a longer word – or even an entire phrase -- more precisely conveys my meaning or more effectively invokes the emotion I'm going for, the longer word it is!

Non-Rule #14:

Short sentences rule!

This is a particular weakness of mine – I tend to string too many thoughts together ... use hyphens and ellipses and other devices to connect them; and only wind up turning sentences into entire paragraphs in which the prospect eventually gets lost or has to read twice. (Damn – did it again!)

I don't worry too much about it on my first drafts. That's when I'm just trying to get everything out on paper. I try to fix my run-ons when I'm editing, later on.

As I edit my copy, I try to keep this advice in mind from the classic book on writing, *The Elements of Style*:

"Vigorous writing is concise. A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences, for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts. This requires not that the writer make all his sentences short, or that he avoid all detail and treat his subjects only in outline, but that every word tell."

Non-Rule #15:

Count commas.

I view commas as warning flags in my copy. Sure – they could be there for a good reason: Like showing the proofreader that I do, in fact, know a thing or two about proper punctuation.

But often times, commas are a big red flag that tells me that I've got a run-on on my hands. Or even worse, they scream, "*HEY, BOZO! You wrote this sentence UPSIDE DOWN!*"

Consider ...

"With only the finest of intentions, Clayton wrote his example."

That comma in the above sentence is a dead-giveaway that something's out of kilter. Wouldn't it read faster if I merely said ...

"Clayton wrote his example with only the finest of intentions."

Non-Rule #16:

Use connecting words at the beginning of paragraphs.

In addition to communicating, every paragraph of great copy should also make a sale: It should “sell” the prospect on the idea of reading the next paragraph.

Early on, I learned that using conjunctions and other connecting words at the beginning paragraphs was a simple way to keep the momentum going: “And” ... “Plus” ... “But” ... “Furthermore” ... “Moreover” ... “What’s more” ... “And there’s more:” ... “Even worse,” for example.

Hint: I like “and” better than “but.” “And” is positive. “But” is negative. I look for “buts” and try to replace them with “ands” wherever I can.

Non-Rule #17:

Look for shortcuts to keep the momentum going.

I make liberal use of contractions. After all -- it’s how people talk! In fact, the only time I write “does not” instead of “doesn’t” is when the “not” is crucial to my meaning. And if it’s really crucial, I’ll add emphasis to it with an underline, italicizing it, capitalizing it, and in some cases, all of the above.

Non-Rule #18:

Be specific.

Every generality in your text is a landmine. That *will* kill you.

Instead of merely saying “you’ll save time,” tell your prospect precisely how much time he’ll save. Don’t say, “Buy now and save!” Say, “You SAVE \$99 by calling in the next 10 minutes!”

I actually read through each draft looking for excuses to add specifics to fully dimensionalize every problem and every promise.

Non-Rule #19:

Consider the question.

Some folks think that asking the prospect a question – either in a headline or elsewhere in your copy is a mistake. “After all,” they say, “Declarative sentences are strong; questions are weak. And besides, how do you really know how the prospect will answer?”

But sometimes questions aren’t weak. Sometimes, they’re hypothetical – and make a very strong declarative statement. A headline I wrote for Louis Navallier – a head that mailed successfully for more than a year -- once asked ...

What’s wrong with getting richer QUICKER?

The copy went on to say:

I’ve made money slow, and I’ve made money fast. Believe

me: Fast is better!

That head wasn't a really question. It was a cry of defiance from impatient investors who were sick and tired of being told to cool their jets.

In the pre-head of a recent direct mail piece for Your Money Report, I wrote ...

- ***Suspicious* of corporate CEOs who lie about their earnings?**
- **Fed up with stockbrokers who tout lousy stocks – and get rich even when *you don't*?**
- ***Impatiently waiting* for the profits Wall Street promises you – but never delivers?**

It's time for *you* to join millions of your fellow Americans who grew rich when they finally said ...

***"Thanks for nothing, Wall Street –
I'd Rather Do It MYSELF!"***

Used properly, questions can often be used to demonstrate that you already know and empathize with the answer. And they can also be a great way to demonstrate the horrifying alternative -- as I did in this P.S. for an investment newsletter ...

P.S. What if I'm *right*? What if I really can help you avoid losses and even profit when tech stocks tumble? How will you feel, licking your wounds and knowing that if you had just said, "YES," to this generous offer, you could have made a killing?

Please – for your sake – let me hear from you today. If I can't help you, my service costs you nothing. If I can, you'll be laughing all the way to the bank.

Non-Rule #20:

When in doubt, cut it out.

After I've completed a draft, I often realize that my best lead is buried a few paragraphs down in the copy. Moving or deleting the first few paragraphs — or even the first page — would get us off to a much faster start.

Another weakness of mine: Excessive repetition. I tend to over-write key paragraphs, or write a key paragraph several different ways. Second drafts are the perfect time to spot this needless repetition and condense several graphs into one, short, punchy one.

Non-Rule #21:

Break the rules!

Never let the fact that a particular technique is frowned upon prevent you from using it.

Follow every road that opens up before you as you write. Explore every unbeaten path. Don't let that left-brained party-pooper who lives inside you kill what could be a great idea before you've had time to fully develop it. Even if you later agree that it doesn't work, you've learned something. And if it does work, you've made a breakthrough.

Hope this helps!

Yours for Bigger Winners, More Often,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "C. Makepeace". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Clayton Makepeace

Publisher & Editor

THE TOTAL PACKAGE™

P.S. If you haven't already, go to www.makepeacetotalpackage.com to sign up for more response-boosting strategies for growth obsessed marketers and business owners.