



The Copywriting Process

Understanding how copywriting works to ensure you get the results you want from your marketing investment!

Cara Tipping Smith, Copy Carats

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Thanks to [Allan Kent](#) of Zeald in Auckland who came up with a brilliant theory that explains why some marketing doesn't work. In fact, it's a very useful theory for understanding why a lot of business purchases go wrong – it's called "The Reluctant Purchase Cycle".

I've borrowed his theory to explain the copywriting process and the pitfalls to avoid. So let's look first at what commonly goes wrong, and then look at what needs to be done to get it right.

Understanding the copywriting process will help you become a better writer if that's your goal, but it will also ensure that any future investment you make in copywriting will bring you the returns you want.

Cara Tipping Smith is a professional copywriter who has worked in the NZ, UK and US markets since 1998. With degrees in English and Psychology, Cara and her team blend the art of language with the science of motivation to write compelling sales messages; messages that work!

Copy Carats specialises in providing quality marketing and communications content for small to medium sized businesses for digital, print, press and voicing; online and on air. See more at www.copycarats.co.nz.

1. The Reluctant Purchase Cycle

Ever bought a pair of shoes in a hurry and regretted it? They were too expensive or too small, or not the right colour after all; or worse, they were cheap but broke on the second wear or leaked in the rain and now, you have to go through the whole process again! Unless you love shopping (and wasting money), you'll know the pain I'm describing. It's just the same in business.

So what is "The Reluctant Purchase Cycle"? I'm sure it will feel very familiar as I describe it. It's that purchase you don't really want to make but feel you have to. For some business owners it's the IT or Accounting system (expensive but they say you need it), for others it's the website or advertising purchase. In every case, it's the thing you're not naturally drawn to and find it hard to think about.



Typically with "The Reluctant Purchase" you go into it grudgingly. Because you don't really expect much from it, you don't put too much time and effort into the process. You have far many more pressing matters to attend to - you're a busy business owner! So you shop around, choose the cheapest option that looks like what you'll need and figure to yourself, "if this works, then (and only then) I'll consider investing more".

Now of course, if you don't get the results you're after you're going to be disappointed, so basically you're not investing too much in it, just yet. When it comes to marketing, you kind of hope it'll surprise you but as you know from experience, most of these things don't really work, but you still have to do something – right?

The problem is it's a self-fulfilling cycle. When it doesn't work, it's only as you expected. Who could blame you? One lousy website with little in the way of results hardly sets you up to be interested in the next, does it?! In fact, you'd be forgiven for thinking that websites just don't work for your business and possibly that all website salespeople are sharks. Certainly, when you go to market again (and you will, because the marketing machine is essential and relentless in this day and age) you will be even more reluctant and less willing to "throw good money after bad".

But here's the trick. When you take a step back and look at this decision process impassively, you realise that it's a kind of madness. Think about it – from the beginning you committed yourself to going through the whole process at least twice ("if this works...")! And worse, your half-hearted commitment to it, pretty much guaranteed its failure.

Hey, I'm not telling you anything you don't know, it's what you'd say to your kids and you'd be right! The reality is when we're busy and feeling overloaded action, any action, can feel like progress... even if it's not. Fortunately for you, you're aware of it now, and so you can check yourself.

2. The Negative Copy Cycle

I've long since lost count of the number of printers, web developers, animators and video producers who tell me their biggest challenge is getting the copy out of the clients. And yet, every business owner these days has a computer, a word processing package and they're only being asked to write about the very thing they know best – their business! So what's really going on?

The Negative Copy Cycle works the same way as The Reluctant Purchase Cycle.

For many business owners, writing is one thing they don't enjoy doing. They put it off, and when the printer, producer or web designer is begging for the words for the go-live date, they self-draft in a hurry.

Some will send that draft for "editing", sometimes even to a professional writer who "tidies" it up. But wait, then they realise they forgot something or someone else has made a new suggestion, or the printer's offering a special deal on a different size brochure... so it has to be rewritten driving the effort and the costs straight up!



At this stage you've only got two options; blow the budget or use what you've got (make it fit somehow). Perhaps you can get the printer to tweak it? Or the web designer? Surely they know about copy... argh it's probably good enough.

Ultimately, everyone is feeling the time pressure. The copy goes live (printed or recorded or posted online), but it's not great. So it doesn't get results, and as a business owner, you feel even less enthusiastic the next time you have to write or need some words written for your business.

And so the cycle continues. It's frustrating, costly and time consuming and it doesn't even work! So why do it? Let's take a look at a different way.

3. The Positive Copy Process

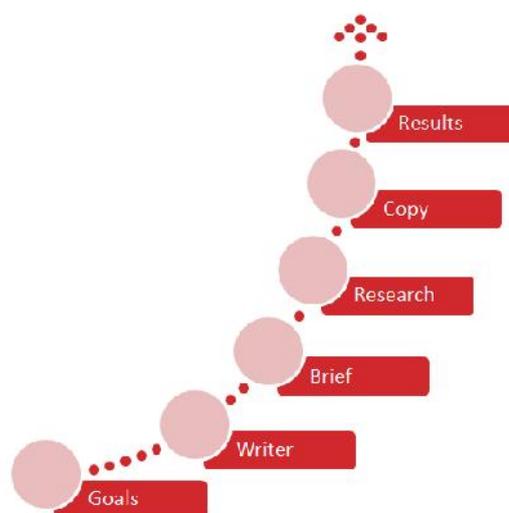
Some years ago, I was hired as a Station Writer for a youth radio brand in Bristol. Having an IT background was a real asset when it came to managing the online site, back then still only an emerging part of radio marketing. The Online Manager and I set some goals, for memberships and unique visits and then I set to writing my butt off. The results? 200% increase in unique visitors, 231% increase in page views and 307% increase in memberships!

Whatever marketing you undertake, you do it because you want results; positive results that translate to your bottom line. As a business owner, you want to make more than you spend but how much more? You'd be surprised at how many business owners haven't considered that question.

You see The Reluctant Purchasing Cycle assumes a nil result. With that process, the business owner is essentially focused on the cost and how much they're prepared to lose. With The Positive Copy Process, the focus is entirely different; the focus is on how much you'll gain.

With positive copy, the business owner has clear goals. It may be that they've worked with a coach, mentor or marketing consultant to create them, but regardless the marketing goals are set; whether that's selling three more coffee machines a week or double turnover in 12 months.

Because they have a goal, they can account for the returns and spending a portion of that on marketing now makes good sense. For positive copy, the owner has one eye on the costs and the other on the gains. They're committed (not half-hearted) and they'll do what it takes to make it happen.

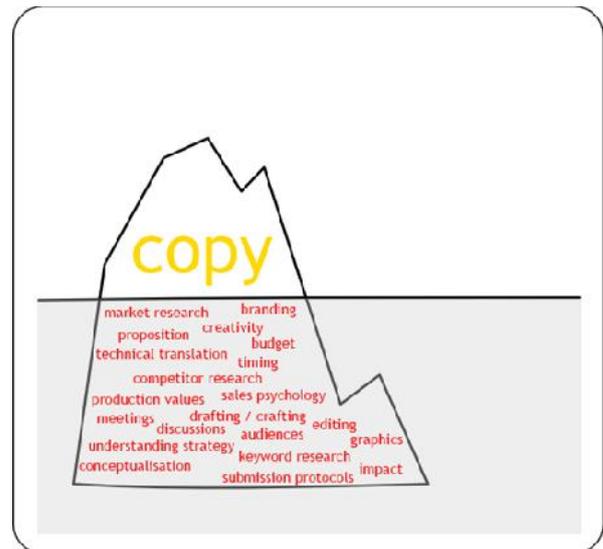


Now if you're not a writer, this is a great time to get the writer involved. Whether you're writing yourself, or hiring a professional you need to put together the brief. *(If you don't know about briefing, see my free download [Giving Good Brief](#) – it outlines the 12 steps to giving a great brief including an easy to use template).*

Once you've got a quality brief, the research begins. There may be a little or a lot, depending on what you have already covered off. A good writer will help you through the brief and identify the areas where they need more information. Feel free to swamp your writer with everything you can think of – a good professional will be very quickly able to sort through your material to find what is and isn't useful and sometimes it's the details that provide the most useful insights to create outstandingly better outcomes.

The research is likely to include; your competitors (you don't want to accidentally sound the same as them), the market (who's likely to be interested in your goods and services) and what will be attractive to them by way of offer. It might even include technical research to fully understand and responsibly translate industry jargon and technical language for your customers.

An important part of the process is for the writer to understand the look and feel of your business and how you represent yourself in other marketing materials (unless you're rebranding – but that's another booklet). It's essential to preserve your existing investment by making sure your customers identify any new marketing initiatives with your business. *(For more on this see my free download "Communication Maths" – it explains the important relationship between your brand and your offer in marketing, and how to avoid driving your customers to your competition!)*



If the writer is writing for a magazine or online journal, they'll have to understand the rules for submission, or what the Editor wants to see. If they're writing for your SEO provider, they have to know what those rules are too. Your budget and the urgency of your marketing (the time frame) are important considerations as well, and that will all be covered off in your brief.

Experienced copywriters are more than proof-readers and great copy requires much more than editing up some reluctantly written words. The really wonderful part of the positive copy process is that as a business owner, you get a free education in marketing, copywriting and the power of persuasion along with fresh new insights into your business and how you can achieve even greater goals. If you're clever (and you really hate writing yourself), your copywriter becomes an essential part of your team, and you can expect more and more from them, in less and less time as they come to understand your business (nearly) as well as you do!

The time you invest in the positive copy process pays off exponentially - and it's absolutely not daunting or a drag! In fact, with the right writer you'll be excited about doing it as it means your business is going to see some serious results.

Congratulations!

That's it. It's time to get excited. What do you want for your business? First page on Google? A quick fire-sale of old stock to reduce your overheads? How about a whole bunch of new customers primed and ready to spend?

Take a moment now, while you're feeling positive to write down some goals. Don't think "a new website", think about the services or products you want to move and put some numbers to it. Calculate what extra revenue that will bring in... and talk to a good copywriter about how to make it happen.

As always, we're happy to help in the way that works best for you. We have a number of packages available on our website which we can tailor to your express needs. And if you want a quick quote for our professional services, just get in touch.

If you want more tips on writing or marketing, sign up to our free newsletter 'the fifth C' on our website. It's monthly and packed with marketing and advertising insights and inspirations - designed to give you all the education you need.

Meantime, happy writing!

Cara Tipping Smith