

10 things you need to know before you engage a copywriter who will benefit your business

Or

How to choose a copywriter who will deliver great results

1. Don't look at costs without analyzing the possible results

Copywriters' fees are mainly dependent on their opportunity costs. So if you are comparing the fees of two copywriters without analyzing what value they can add to your business is akin to comparing an apple and a banana. Check out the copywriters past work, his achievements and his marketing savvy. Speak to him/her at length to discover his understanding of your business or industry. Check if he is nimble with ideas and concepts that will appeal. Then compare the possible ROI to his price. To quote an example – if a copywriter is charging 5k for an assignment and his value add is nil, he is more expensive than a copywriter who charges 15k and delivers three times the value. The most expensive copywriter is not the one who charges more, but the person who does not deliver ROI (Return on Investments)

2. How do you calculate the value a copywriter delivers?

A good copywriter will increase your sales response, he will improve your visibility, he will increase the stickiness of your message, he will improve your conversion, he will bring directed, targeted business to you and he will increase your corporate goodwill. Analyze his output on these terms and you will get a fair idea what you are getting for your buck.

3. How to choose a copywriter for your assignment? Is an independent copywriter better or is it advisable to use freelancers who work in large agencies?

There is no gainsaying the fact that copywriters who work in large agencies are talented. But the down side is that they have very little time to devote to your assignment. Secondly, he is not dependent on your fees for his bread and butter. So, at most times they will work on Sundays and deliver your copy. An independent copywriter though is a serious professional; he does not have the luxury of not doing a slap bang job. His bread and butter depend on your fees. Since he gets business only by referrals, chances are that he will go the extra mile to ensure that your ad or promotional material is top of the line. He does not have the same time issues as an agency copywriter and he

can devote more time to your assignment. Ultimately though, I would suggest you check the talent and deliverables of each of the copywriters before you take a call.

4. How to get the best out of the copywriter you hire?

The fundamental rule of communication is that the more you tell, the more the copywriter will sell. You know your business well; you know your industry and your target audience. Tell all you know about your target audience, their buying preferences, their choices and their behavior patterns to the copywriter. Detail him about the product or service you offer, its USP's, its differentiators etc. Empower him to be in your shoes, and then leave him to do the job.

5. Should the copywriter have experience and knowledge about my industry before I hire him?

It is better if he does have some knowledge, but that should not be a deal breaker. Think of the copywriter as a painter. (I am assuming he/she is experienced and has exposure to various industries having worked in them) You do not expect the painter to have painted in your building as a pre condition to giving him the assignment. You also do not expect him to have painted the same shade before you engage him. Just like a painter knows how to paint, a copywriter comes to you with twin competencies – knowing how to sell to different audiences, and the language competency to communicate. Most copywriters will study your competition, understand your industry, and get familiar with your TG before they attempt to write. So if he is competent, then the particular industry experience will not be an impediment. If he is not competent, then years of similar industry experience will not help.

6. Should I employ a copywriter for his language skills? Will an editor or a journalist do?

I like to say that language skills are the second best competency that any copywriter can have. The first skill is to know how to sell. If a copywriter does not know how to sell, then all the language skills in the world will not help him sell your product or service. Focus on the selling skills of the copywriter first, and then check his linguistic skills. An editor or a journalist is taught to tell, a copywriter is taught to sell. That is the difference. If you want to tell something, engage a journalist, if you want to sell something, engage a copywriter.

7. Should I employ an experienced copywriter or will a young, aspiring copywriter do as well?

When I was a young copywriter, I wrote a sales letter that said that the best time to buy a Husain painting was when he was unknown and making his mark! Copywriters are similar, if you find a young copywriter who has fire in the belly, ink on his hands and the ability to sell snow to Eskimos, sure, do not let a good thing by. In fact, if you know of such copywriters, I would like to employ them! 😊 But experience tempers talent; it hones ability and seasons one's capabilities. *Tried and tested is almost always better than wanting to be trusted.*

8. Should I check the copywriters' grammar skills and knowledge before I give him an assignment?

I was once approached by one of the leading companies of the world – a 100+ year old venerable US company that believed that unless their language, grammar, and punctuation was perfect, they would not publish the ad.

I famously told them, forget grammar and think about potatoes!

They demanded an explanation and were affronted by my statement. I told them, I am here to sell your product or service – let's call it potatoes. I believe people will not be prompted to buy the potato just because the copywriter has written the appeal in picture perfect English. Yet if I use Hinglish – a combination of English and Hindi, and maybe invent a word and attract attention, evoke interest, create desire and prompt action they will be motivated to buy. So I told them if you want picture perfect grammar, go to a school teacher. I will bend the rules, invent words where required, but I will sell your potatoes. That does not of course mean that I will not be careful where I need to be. But I need to have the liberty to sell, without grammar and punctuation binding my hands. Most experienced copywriters will offer you the correct grammar and punctuations, unless they wish to break a rule in favor of selling your potato!

9. Isn't my salesman the best man to write my brochure or ad film? After all he has spent years selling my product and performed par excellence?

A salesman sells person to person. He uses relationship as a tool to sell. Interpersonal selling skills are as different from mass media selling as is a bathroom singer from a playback singer. What works well in one setting will not work in another. A Copywriter is a specialist in selling in mass media. He is an expert in selling sans relationship.

10. How to negotiate timelines when engaging a copywriter?

My positioning statement says – Creative Copy – within Deadlines, without Dead-Lines! Yet, even today I have to sweat it out in the early mornings to meet all my deadlines without the famous – dead- lines! Developing copy is a tricky thing – sometimes I can write a full ten minute film script in an hour, sometimes it takes me a couple of days. Deadlines should almost always be planned with a buffer period. Basically because sometimes there are days when the inspiration is hard to come by. Then there is the dreaded writer’s block during which the copywriter stares at the blank screen without knowing what to write. It is all part of the process. The best way to fix reasonable deadlines is in collaboration with the copywriter. Give him/her his comfort zone so that he/she produces his/her best work. It pays, believe me.