

Creative intelligence for  
startups and scaleups

A background image showing two business professionals, a woman with glasses and a man, smiling and looking at a laptop in an office setting. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent orange/red filter.

# Copywriting for your startup

A guide to going it alone

**SIM7**  
Creative Agency

# Writing your own copy? Here's how it's done

When you're just setting out on your new business journey, it can often be tempting to DIY some of the bits on your long to-do list. After all, your startup budget can't stretch to everything that needs to be done, can it?

Unfortunately, one task that often falls into the category of 'how hard can it be?' is copywriting. The temptation to knock out those words you need for your website can be strong because...well...good copywriters don't come cheap. And after all: where's the harm? We'd counter: where's the value?

Well-crafted copy can transform your business. It can boost customer engagement, generate awareness, create loyalty and make people want to spend their money with you. It's powerful stuff. And the uncomfortable truth is that it's unlikely that you, regardless of the grade you got in A Level English, can write the copy that will send your business stratospheric.

Is that harsh? Perhaps! But it's also true. The chances are what you come up with would be perfectly 'fine'. We can all snap photos with our iPhones, we can all cook a nutritious (ish!) meal when pushed. But we are not all photographers and we're certainly not all Michelin-starred chefs.

However, we also understand that top quality SLR cameras (and their operators!) and award-winning dining experiences come at a cost. One which may be out of reach for the time being. Just as full-service creative agency support might be only a longer-term ambition for a startup just emerging from the blocks.



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## DIY copywriting – start here

The good news is not lost. If you're forced to go it alone, the right words for your website, marketing materials and social media posts are there inside you. Think carefully about exactly what you're offering to your prospective customers or clients. In particular, look at things from their perspective - what will they get out of what you're offering? Don't over-complicate things, keep it simple and your message will be more likely to stick.

Add to that a bit of tweaking and finessing courtesy of the pointers below and the chances are you'll end up with a reasonably solid draft in front of you. Certainly, good enough to tide you over until you grow to the point you're ready to get the professionals in.

## Watch out for these:

### Repetition

Trying to write an 'About us' page for your own website is tougher than it looks. Return to it with fresh eyes and it'll be littered with – previously invisible – repeated words and phrases. Every other sentence will probably begin with 'We', for example. And you should never 'wee' on your copy as that hilarious copywriter joke goes!

Our tip? Write your copy, leave it for a while and then edit with fresh eyes and a hot cuppa. And don't be afraid to get a friend or team member to read it through for you too. Remember you don't have to take everything they say onboard but it's good to get that second perspective.

### Talking to the wrong audience

Your business is ticking over nicely; you've started to gain some real traction, secured a major customer, for example, and achieved some real milestones. The temptation is to tell everyone about it; to fire out 'news' on your blog and over your social media channels. And why not? You want your competitors to know exactly how well you're doing, don't you?

But your audience isn't the competition; they're not the ones that will be making a difference to your bottom line. That's your potential customers.

And while a few selected highlights won't go amiss, the rest is a distraction. And beyond saying 'we're in business and we're succeeding' your message isn't one that's going to persuade them to buy. If you can tailor that 'news' message to show your audience what's in it for them, great. Otherwise, save those 'exciting' news bites for your internal newsletter and to share with your mum next time you meet for Sunday lunch.

## Saying too much

When your life is making and selling widgets day in, day out, it's easy to focus on the minutiae; on all the elements that come together to make your widgets work. After all, you know how much blood sweat and tears went into the research and development.

But do your potential customers really need to know all the technicalities? Almost definitely not.

Save the details for a data sheet, an appendix, or a face-to-face meeting. Say enough to pique interest and signpost them to where the nitty gritty is should they want to indulge. That way you're giving everyone what they need.

## Selling too hard

In business, the adage is: Always Be Closing. But when it comes to marketing copy, there's a time to sell and a time to tell. Avoid aggressive Calls to Action, brash headlines and inflated claims. In this day and age it can all leave a bit of a sour taste in the mouth. And as a brand it's probably not the impression you want to give.

## Overthinking things

You know what's acceptable for your business and what's not; what you can say and what you can't. Don't be tempted to pick over your copy endlessly and 'play devil's advocate' over how a phrase or statement could be construed. Start heading down that road and you'll end-up with an anodyne page of nonsense that no one will want to read.





# Inconsistency

This is a big issue when it comes to customer-facing copy and it relates to how you abbreviate, what you call your products and the tone of voice (TOV) you use. This stuff is more important than you might think. Chopping and changing the way you write can at best cause confusion in your reader and at worst make them think you can't be trusted...or don't know what you're doing!

So the best thing you can do is make a few decisions before you start. Will you use contractions – words like 'you're' instead of 'you are'? Contractions can sound friendly, whereas the alternative might offer a more serious or professional tone. Neither is right or wrong, go with your preference but keep it consistent throughout.

Similarly, numbers and dates – how will you write them? Journalists choose to write out numbers one through nine but use numerals for 10 onwards. Where do you stand on this? What would you like to see in your TOV?

Check back and forth throughout your copy to make sure you pick up inconsistencies and feed back to anyone else you trust to write your words to make sure they're doing the same thing.

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