

Here is a sample section from my e-book, “**Big Profits from Short Copy,**” that I wrote for master copywriter and publisher, Bob Bly. The book is targeted at online and offline copywriters.

Section 1

Emails: Personal... But Not Too Personal

I don't have to tell you how ubiquitous emails are. How many of us start and end our days by checking our inboxes?

Like any other mass communication, it's become a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it offers instant written communication that can be enormously beneficial. On the other hand, it delivers meaningless messages that just clog our inboxes.

But make no mistake. For direct marketers, email has become an absolutely indispensable tool to reach current customers, new customers or to sell products for another company on an opt-in list. In fact, for many marketers, email has now replaced or overshadowed traditional print campaigns.

Why? Quite simply - it's cheap and measurable. Marketers can now test, target and measure in ways that weren't possible before. A well orchestrated email campaign (often in conjunction with other marketing tools) can reap great benefits for both the marketer – and for you.

Think about it... If savvy marketers are increasingly using email marketing to reach their customers, they're going to need equally savvy copywriters to compose all those emails. That's when your phone rings. Or, ironically, you get an email from them inquiring about your services.

Before getting into the various types of emails you'll be writing, let's take a moment to talk about the unique voice and tone of this ultra-specific marketing tool.

Subject Lines – Do or Die!

First of all, the subject line needs to grab the reader by the lapels. Nothing less will do. You can't count on the fact that since the reader has already opted into your list that he or she will automatically read it.

I like to think of the subject line as the actual headline in a sales letter. If it isn't strong enough to get your reader's undivided attention, all your great, persuasive copy inside will just get tossed with the click of a mouse.

When creating your subject line, think about the four U's so often attributed to great headlines – Urgency, Usefulness, Uniqueness and Ultra-Specificity. Try to get at least three of these components into your subject line. For example, “Your Taipan Newsletter Subscription Expires in 37 hours!”

You can also ask your client if there are certain **subject line keywords** that have worked in the past.

Be specific enough so that the reader immediately understands what your email contains. In composing the subject line, think about a specific area of interest to the reader or a solution to a problem the reader is trying to solve. For frequent air travelers the subject line might read, “Jet Blue’s \$49 Airfare to 49 Cities ends today!”

Email copywriting expert, Jay White, offers a unique take on writing subject lines.

“Don’t start with the subject line. Start by developing a theme. Take one want/need/desire/problem your prospect is experiencing and tie it together with something completely unrelated. Think of a personal story... a classic movie... even a current news event. Then ‘marry’ those two together in your email and write around that theme.

“Once you have your theme, type a draft of your email. Then look for something that ‘jumps out.’ Could be a phrase, a line or just a couple of words. Voila! That’s your subject line.”

Using Jay’s suggestion, I thought about all the political emails that I receive around election time. Tying those to something completely unrelated, I thought about the well-known slogan for Michelin Tires, “Because so much is riding on your tires.” Then, combining the two, I came up with my own subject line. “Because so much is riding on your vote.”

Politics and tires? Strange bedfellows. And yet it works.

Remember, your subject line may be among dozens that the reader is already in the process of deleting. Yours subject line has to stop them dead in their tracks.

The Unique “Voice” of Emails

Okay, so you’ve passed the first hurdle. The reader has opened your email. Like any other form of direct response, you’re trying to get your reader to take an action. And how do you get them to do that? Well... with a tone and voice that’s unique to emails.

Let’s begin with the understanding that the individual’s email inbox is a personal and private space. That’s why we all hate spam so much. It’s arrives uninvited.

“You have to write according to the nature of the medium,” states Nick Usborne, a well respected authority on internet marketing. “You have to respect the fact that you are entering into a place people consider to be their own and personal.”

Emails tend to be less formal than actual letters. Finding just the right personal and genuine voice is the key. It will often depend on what the reader opted in to receive.

If they’re expecting hot deals and new products, go ahead and sell them - but in an engaging, personal way. However, if they opted in for tips and helpful information, you need to be more judicious about how you present any sales pitches.

One word of caution about tone... Because emails tend to be less formal, there is the temptation to become too informal. Remember, you’re not texting your best buddy. Avoid acronyms and emoticons such as BTW, LOL, and ☺. Make it personal, but always professional.

Another important thing to remember with email campaigns is that you’re building an ongoing relationship with the reader. If you’ve nurtured that relationship over time, the reader will actually look forward to receiving your emails. If you haven’t, and they’ve been constantly disappointed, even a great subject line won’t get your email opened. Again, reputation is everything.

Short – But Engaging

As a general rule, emails are short communications. Unless you’re specifically asked to write long copy or a newsletter, emails tend to run under 500 words. And quite often, they’re in the 200-300 word range or shorter.

Even though emails tend to be short, that doesn’t mean you can’t get creative with your message. If you’re focused on selling a product or service, try adding in a story, request consumer feedback, give consumer feedback or post some photos. Just remember to engage the reader on a truly personal level.

Types of Emails

Now that we’ve set some guidelines for writing emails in general, let’s dive into three specific types of emails you’ll most likely be asked to write.

1. Standard Email Marketing Message (E-Letter)

This is perhaps the most common type of email you’ll be asked to write. It’s an email sent by an online marketer to the subscribers on his opt-in e-list for the purpose of selling a product or service. The message features a unique solution to a problem that the prospect is experiencing.

As you might expect, writing an email marketing message is similar to writing a sales letter, except the copy is usually shorter - and you're linking them to a landing page where, hopefully, the deal is closed.

In the email, you create a link the reader can click to visit the landing page. I suggest repeating these links several times, even in a short email message, because I've found that it increases click-through rates.

Once again, the purpose of your email is generally not to sell the product, but rather drive as much traffic to the landing page as possible. It's most often the landing page copy, and not the email, that does the bulk of the selling.

If there already is a landing page, ask your client to see it. This will help guide your email message. If the landing page is long, the email should be short. But if the landing page happens to be short, your email should be longer. In the end, one of those two vehicles (email or landing page) needs to do the heavy lifting.

Regarding word count, a teaser (short copy) email will generally consist of 250-500 words - while longer email copy can run as much as 2,500 words, depending on the needs of the message.

2. Ezine – Email Marketing Newsletter

An ezine is a daily, weekly or monthly email marketing newsletter. Think of it as an online magazine that contains articles, editorial content, entertainment and sales materials which generally follows the written newsletter formula.

Here are some tips for writing an ezine:

- **Be unique.** You need to differentiate your voice and personality from all the other noise in the ezine marketplace competing for your prospects. Find a unique voice that's hard to match. Use vivid descriptions. Be colorful. Don't be afraid to use metaphors that are readily acceptable to the niche you're writing for.

If you're writing a monthly investment news letter, perhaps you could include personal stories of real people - and how the money they made through tips in the newsletter changed their lives for the better. The readers may end up looking forward to the personal stories as much as they do to the advice itself.

- **Write to one person.** When writing an ezine, it's easy to think that you're writing for a group. Well, you are. But try to envision one person in that group you're writing for. And write specifically to him or her. Your copy will then take on a very personal tone, which will make it much more engaging to the reader.

- **Develop a content structure for your newsletter.** As you start to develop a following, your readers will come to expect that structure.
- **Strike a balance between editorial content and selling.** Remember, your readers are looking to your newsletter for valuable and timely content. Eventually you'll find that "editorial vs. selling" balance. And once you do, stick to it for all future issues.
- **Encourage activity.** Don't think of the ezine a static document, but as an interactive two way street. Invite your readers to get involved with comments, surveys, contests, etc.
- **Track the results of your newsletter.** This will help you gauge the interest of your readers. Click-through statistics to landing pages or sign-up pages are vital to refining future content.

A typical ezine edition consists of 5-7 short articles. Each article is 3-7 paragraphs long and averages between 100-300 words. So a typical edition might run between 1,500 and 2,000 words.

Marketers like AWAI – www.awaionline.com - post a newsletter called "The Golden Thread" with helpful tips on copywriting. Taipan Publishing – www.taipandaily.com and Early to Rise www.earlytorise.com send out daily financial newsletters. Copywriter Bob Bly posts a monthly newsletter, "The Direct Response Letter" via his website, www.bly.com

3. Auto-Responder

This lucrative email niche is often overlooked by copywriters. It shouldn't be. There's good money to be made here.

Let's start by defining this term. Auto-responder is an email sent to a reader who has already made a purchase or subscribed to a newsletter - or made an inquiry regarding a purchase or subscription by visiting a website or landing page.

If they've already purchased or subscribed, the auto-responder can upsell them to other products or to a more expensive product than the one they just bought. This is often referred to as the "thank you and please" message.

For example, every time I buy a CD on Amazon, I'm sure to get an auto-responder telling me how much I'd enjoy listening to other CD's by that artist or similar artists. And, I can tell you from personal experience, it works!

If the reader hasn't made a purchase yet, the auto-responder is a perfect opportunity to woo them some more - and hopefully convert that visitor into a

buyer. Quite often, a free report is offered that will eventually persuade the reader to buy or subscribe.

Here is a more elaborate list of reasons to send an auto-responder message.

- Confirming the order
- Providing instructions for the purchase
- Reinforcing key benefits
- Restating the satisfaction guarantee
- Offering contact information
- And, of course, thanking them for their business

Most auto-responder emails are 200-600 words. And quite often you'll be asked to write a series of 5 or more auto-responders for the same product, each with a different theme.

Going After the Work

To find work as an email copywriter, you'll want to contact traditional Internet marketers, as well as direct marketers, who have both an offline and online presence. The marketing directors or sales managers would be the persons to speak with.

All else being equal, the profit the client makes from email marketing is directly proportional to the number of emails sent. Therefore, clients with larger online subscriber lists (100,000 or more) can afford to pay more for email marketing messages than those with smaller (10,000 or fewer) subscribers.

Some Final Thoughts...

To learn how to write effective email marketing messages, you should study traditional advertising copywriting and other media. The principles are the same. And, in addition, pay attention to the email marketing messages you get every day, particularly those that seem interesting and persuasive.

When a company approaches you about writing an email, ask to see samples of their more successful email marketing campaigns. I can't overstate the value of this. Why start from scratch, when you can use a roadmap?

Also, ask the client if there are keywords in the subject lines or body copy that work particularly well for their offers. Then sprinkle those same keywords in your subject lines and copy, as well.

Clearly, email will be with us for a long, long time. If you can write powerful, persuasive messages for this omnipresent medium - the work will find you.

Additional Resources

The Official Get Rich Guide to Information Marketing by Dan Kennedy (Entrepreneur Press, 2007)

The Online Copywriter's Handbook by Robert Bly (McGraw-Hill, 2002)

Copywriting 2.0: Your Complete Guide to Writing Web Copy that Converts By Nick Usborne (ebook)