

## CHAPTER FIVE

### OUTDOOR ADVERTISING COPYWRITING

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“Outdoor advertising is a true test of creativity because you need to communicate your entire selling message in an instant” Drewniany and Jewler (2014)

**A**dvertising copywriting is one of the most essential elements of effective advertisement. The art and science of copywriting involve strategically writing words, visuals and other elements that promote a person, product, business, opinion, or idea, with the ultimate intention of having the reader take intended action.

So, whether you're looking to sell something or inform people about an idea, you'll need to tell compelling stories that grab attention and connect with people so they'll respond the way

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you want. Advertising copy writer has two basic tasks to accomplish. They are:

1. a never ending search for an advertising idea;
2. a never ending search for new and different ways to express those ideas.

The advertising idea must anticipate *ad placement and timing*. Whatever the kind of advertising, the copy writer must choose each word carefully, making sure the words chosen carry just the right meaning.

Like in most writing, advertising copy requires several revision before it takes its final form. According to Ogilvy and Mather in *How to Write Better*, "never be content with your first draft. Rewrite with an eye toward simplifying and clarifying. Rearrange. Revise. Above all, cut".

A copy writer should be able to handle all kinds of writing, for a copy can take the form of a story, a piece of reporting, a poem, a play or any literary form. And whatever kind of literature the copywriter chooses to produce, it must be done with a limited number of words.

There are as many definitions of copywriting as there are copywriters in this world. In its strictest sense, copywriting is "the act of writing advertisements" (like headlines, slogans, brochures, direct mail packages and even websites) with the goal of making a sale. The most poetic definition of copywriting was written by Bruce Bendinger (2002), who in his remarkable book *The Copy Workshop Workbook* writes...

- ❖ Copywriting is a job. ❖
  - A skill craft.
  - Verbal carpentry.
  - Words on paper.
  - Scripts to time.
  - And one more thing.
- ❖ Salesmanship. ❖

Copywriting is the art and science of writing words to promote a product, a business, a person or an idea; and carefully selecting, editing, weaving and constructing those words in a way that they'll persuade the reader into taking a specific and measurable action. The end goal of copywriting is not always to sell the product in a single blow, but to persuade the reader into taking a specific action.

This "action" can be subscribing to a newsletter, calling the phone number on screen, clicking a link, sending an e-mail to their friends, etc. Any of those actions will be used, in turn, to advance the sale further. *Copywriting is both the art and science of promoting in writing: a person, a business, a product, an idea or opinion with the purpose of delivering a message to its target audience and persuading the reader into taking a specific action.*

From the above definitions, it can be concluded that "a copywriter is a salesperson in front of a keyboard". The art of copywriting is the art of craftsmanship. It requires some creativity from the part of the copywriter. It is the innate talent which the copywriter has in him.

A good copywriter has a keen eye to watch, grasp and catch even the minute and momentary aspects of life and make them meaningful. It is purely marketing based and the job of a copywriter will turn one into the lime light of his career. Copywriting is a life long process through which, day by day one can achieve more knowledge and know the magic realism through alphabets, words, phrases, clauses and sentences.

A good copywriter is the one who knows the heart of the consumers. Copywriting skills are both innate and acquired. Some people are born with innate creative skills which will require some polishing, while others can learn the art and science of copywriting. If you want to learn the fundamentals of copywriting, you should first put to rest the myth that this is a complex science that takes years of study. No one starts off as a great copywriter, but if you try your best and learn from errors,

you can make surprisingly fast progress at developing some impressive copywriting skills.

Whilst creative writing is more art than science, informed opinion is that copywriting is far more a science than an art. This is, by and large, an accurate assessment, although it would be a serious mistake to underestimate the importance of creative flair in copy writing. Comparing the two, a novelist will use artistry to produce a great piece of work, but this cannot happen without having a template; science is used to give an order to the artistic prose. A copywriter will use science to optimally trigger buying impulses. Marketing strategies have been around for long enough that there is little guesswork involved in what does or does not work. Copywriters should not forget that humans are emotional creatures. The paradox is that to trigger these emotional responses requires a scientific approach by the copywriter; an observance of certain rules proven to have worked time and time again.

Advertising, like any other forms of promotion, is first and foremost a communication that depends on design to deliver its message to a specific audience. But unlike any other form of communication, advertising must communicate its message quickly and effectively. This is so because, according to Jewler and Drewniany (2001; p138);

the prettiest ad is worthless unless what you want to convey to your audience is clear, understandable, and useful to them. Good design makes your message easier to understand.

To successfully deliver messages effectively, advertising copy writer employ good design principles. A good design principle enables the ad to get as much information as possible to the audience in the shortest possible time.

For outdoor copy, the creative challenge is how to present a message that will deliver its content to a reader who is in a hurry and has few seconds to read, comprehend and digest the advertisement as intended by the advertiser. The outdoor copy helps to reinforce other advertisements from other media.

#### THE NATURE OF ADVERTISING COPY WRITING

Copywriters use art, type styles, and the arrangement of elements on printed pages to attract, hold and make audience buy in to the messages on display. Advertising communication differs from other form of communication in two fundamental ways. These are:

1. Advertisers pay to push their messages across. To this end, the advertiser has control over how, where and when the message is delivered.
2. The advertiser also decides the size and content of the message to be delivered.

Advertisements are aimed at persuading people to do something or accept something. Therefore, they must use all the attributes of the communication process to attain maximum effectiveness including typography and graphics. Every advertisement must be able to do the following for it to be effective:

- 1) Grasp Attention.
- 2) Arouse Interest.
- 3) Create Desire.
- 4) Move the prospect to take desired Action.

Good advertising design helps in achieving all the above and more but also:

- Attracts the target audience
- Holds the target audience attention
- Makes the information easier to remember
- Helps organise ideas
- Emphasises the most compelling information

For the message to do the above, it is not just the words that are needed, the visuals and arrangement of all the elements are also very paramount. In most advertising, the power to get attention primarily lies with the visuals. Advertisement with pictures tends to pull more readers into the body copy; initial attention are more likely to give interest to strong visuals. People not only notice ad. visuals, they remember ads. with pictures more than those composed mostly of type.

The basic design tools used by designers to create effective advertisements are:

- a) **Illustrations or photos:** These comprise photographs and drawings which serve different purposes in ads. Pictures have strong authenticity that make ads powerful. Many people believe pictures don't lie; hence, when thinking of believability, photograph is a good medium. Although with digitisation, photographs can be altered, yet, they are still more believable than other forms of illustration.
- b) **Colour:** This is also one of the elements used to communicate powerfully to attract attention, provide realism, established moods and build brand identity.
- c) **Typography:** It has a functional role in the way it presents the letters in words so that they can be easily read. It also has aesthetic role and can contribute to intended meaning.
- d) **Lines and borders:** there are one thousand and one lines and borders that can be used to create effective advertising and public relations communications.
- e) **Headline:** this is one of the most important elements in an advertisement. Its primary function is to attract attention. It can also be used to state or imply a benefit.
- f) **Copy:** This refers to the printed words in an advertisement. It is made up of the headline and body information. Copy is composed of words, and the best copy is composed of the best words, that can be found, words that stop you in your tracks, words that sell you, words that get you going.

words that reflect the prospect point of view rather than the communicator's.

Every design choice taken in advertising has both functional and aesthetic roles to play. The functional sides make the visual message easy to perceive while the aesthetic sides make it attractive and pleasing to the eye.

#### DESIGN PRINCIPLES IN COPY WRITING

1. Balance.
2. Contrast.
3. Harmony.
4. Proportion.
5. Movement.

Design is usually improved by simplifying the number of elements. The goal of graphic elements in advertisement is to facilitate quick and easy comprehension of the printed words.

In creating a successful advertising design, two words are very important: **creativity** and **strategy**. Creativity means finding a new and unique way to present an idea graphically, while strategy means developing a plan to present the message in a way that will achieve the desired goals.

There are several design options to choose from, especially with computer and design software. However, the following rules of thumb by Jewler and Drewniany (2014) should be adhered to:

1. Don't set type wider than 29 characters.
2. Avoid setting copy in less than 10 point type. Smaller type is hard to read and you don't want to frustrate your audience while reading your ad.
3. Break up long copy blocks with subheads.
4. Avoid setting body copy in reverse (white on black). This tends to cut down readership. Headlines may be reversed for impact, provided the type is large and bold enough.
5. Take care when you print copy over tonal matter, such as photographs.

6. Use lower case when possible. It tends to be more legible than all capital letters.
7. Either capitalise the entire headline or capitalise only the first word of a sentence and any proper noun.
8. End the headline with punctuation. Use the period or a question mark. Save the exclamation mark for the rare occasion when it is warranted.
9. Align all copy elements to avoid a jumbled look.
10. Use normal punctuation throughout. Avoid leaders (...)
11. Use italics sparingly. They are good for occasional emphasis, but too many italics make copy look pale and weak.

Before you start designing your ad, there are basic things that you must remember to do. For any copywriter, this is usually the starting points. They are:

- a) **Research:** this includes research into your client's product, company, services, customers and the client competitors.
- b) **Roughs:** this is where you put your ideas to paper as it appear to you. Another name for it is thumbnails. Where you put your ideas in sketches without much details.
- c) **Revise:** here, you rework your thumbnails based on additional ideas or information you got.
- d) **Ready:** this is where the final copy is ready for final touch and client approval.
- e) **Run:** at this stage, the advertisement is running in the media.

As a student of advertising copywriting and most especially outdoor copy, you will need to know and master the use of the following computer applications and software:

1. Photo manipulation software such as adobe Photoshop.
2. Presentation software.

3. Illustration software.
4. Desktop publishing software.

The above remains as tools in your hand that must be creatively applied to produce a copy that must first communicate effectively and secondly be a classic work of art. Whether these tools will deliver great copy for you depends on your mastery and creativity.

#### WRITING EFFECTIVE OUTDOOR COPY

In advertising copy writing generally, we talk about brevity because of the constraints and peculiarity of advertising message and its media. The test of brevity is in outdoor media. According to Jewler and Drewniany (2001), "if brevity is the soul of effective copy, the outdoor is the final proving ground for that premise".

The above statement is so because of the nature and peculiarity of outdoor medium. The characteristics of outdoor include:

1. Mass coverage: outdoor advertising is a mass oriented medium which appeal to large number of readers on a daily basis.
2. Impact: if well and strategically located, outdoor advertisements have the capacity to make positive impact on reader.
3. Flexibility: outdoor media provide advertisers with geographic flexibility to place their messages in terms of cost, creative technique and impact.
4. Cost efficiency: outdoor medium provides advertisers with cost efficient ways of reaching its target audience.
5. It delivers its message to an audience that is constantly mobile.
6. It delivers its message to its audience at a distance that varies continuously.
7. Outdoor offers continuity of message for relatively long time. An outdoor message will remain on the board for a

period of 30 or more days on the spot until the expiration of the contract.

8. It offers repetition of message across several routes on a number of boards.

With the characteristics of outdoor listed above, it is obvious while it continues to be advertiser's medium of choice. Across several cities and communities, outdoor billboards are part of the landscape features.

In writing copy for billboard, all the rules that apply for other media must be adhered to. However, the copy for an outdoor is unique in several ways because of the way people come in contact with outdoor messages.

Like all print copy, outdoor copy has different parts that serve different purposes. Below are different parts of an outdoor copy:

**THE HEADLINE:** this is usually the first visible component of an outdoor copy. The copywriter job is to use the headline to arrest the attention of passer by to a copy. The headline performs the following functions in a copy:

- a. Capture the attention of the reader.
- b. Lure the reader into the body copy.
- c. Communicate a benefit.
- d. Reinforce the brand name.
- e. Make a connection to the customer.
- f. Enhance visual.

#### TYPES OF HEADLINES THAT CAN BE USED IN OUTDOOR COPY

1. **Direct benefits:** this type of headline offers readers a reason to use the product.
2. **Reverse benefits:** this headline implies that the consumers will be worse off without the advertised product or service.
3. **Factual headline:** this headline gives interesting facts about the product or service.

4. **Selective headline:** it is used to attract a specific audience e.g. mothers, fathers, drivers, etc.
5. **Curiosity headline:** this type is used to arouse the curiosity the reader, which the other part of the ad. will satisfy.
6. **Screaming headline:** another word for this is "Brag and Shout" headline. This type shouts the quality or uniqueness of the product or service. However, when this type of headline is used, you must be very sure the product or service is superlative, and the body copy should make clear the reason for your claim.
7. **Question headline:** the question may be direct or rhetorical. This type of headline is very useful in helping to get the reader into the body of the copy to get an answer to the question in the headline.

In selecting types to use in headline, it is important to note the functions headline perform and select type that will enhance the success of the headline. For outdoor, the number one function of the headline is to **arrest attention**.

• **THE VISUAL:** this could be picture or illustrations. The visuals are to enhance the headline and this must be simple and catchy enough to make the reader wants to read more of the entire copy within seconds.

• **THE BODY COPY:** while the headline arouses the interest of the reader, the copy completes the story. The copy provides answers to questions the headline might have raised in the mind of the reader. However, the copy must be in few words and if possible a word or more that the reader can take in seconds and understand. Effective copy in outdoor advertising combines simplicity with brevity.

• **MANDATORIES:** these are statements that are required by law or by clients that must appear in the advertisement. They include for example; 'smokers are liable to die young', 'drink

responsibly'. Others include slogans, special discount, closing hours or other small details the clients require of you. It is your job as a copy writer to ensure that your copy contains these small but important words.

#### **GUIDELINES FOR WRITING OUTDOOR COPY**

- 1) Use few words in the body copy.
- 2) Use bold and legible type.
- 3) Use large illustrations.
- 4) Use bold colours.
- 5) Use simple background.
- 6) Use product identification.
- 7) Ensure that the brand or company's name is prominent.
- 8) You can consider using the campaign theme or tagline as the headline.

Generally, in writing copy for any medium, the rule of thumb that should inform your attitude is listed below:

1. Love your product.
2. Don't try to do everything in one copy: develop one single theme and follow it through.
3. Write to an individual.
4. Translate business speaking to human speaking.
5. Avoid catchall phrase such as value, quality, good service, caring, integrity, etc.
6. Be specific.
7. Don't brag.
8. Use the present tense and active voice whenever possible.
9. Use transition words to connect thoughts and establish relationships.
10. Avoid clichés.
11. Vary the length and structure of your sentence.
12. Make the strange familiar and make the familiar strange.
13. Pay attention to every word you use.
14. Proofread your final version: one wrong letter in the copy

can make a big difference, be careful.

Please note that there are no hard and fast rules on what the length of the headline should be. Also, what determines whether you are going to need a long or short copy depends on the nature of the product or service you are writing for. The best guiding philosophy is to write as much as you need to accomplish the company objective.

#### **Conclusion**

Outdoor copy looks easy to write, yet it takes a creative mind to come up with a telegraphic, so concise, yet so clear message, that people will be interested in reading while driving along the expressway or on their way to the busy market across the country.

Historically, outdoor advertising copy writing is as old as advertising itself; hence, it is one of the most important forms of copy that every student of copy writing should learn and perfect how to do excellently.