

The Seven Deadly Myths of Web Writing

John Forde

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The Seven Deadly Myths of Web Writing

I call these myths “deadly.” Because in my opinion — and in the opinions of many other copywriters with proven online success — these are popular misconceptions about web writing which, unfortunately, still derail web writers and marketers all the time.

The following list of myths addresses some of the biggest assumptions your future clients might make about online copy. After each myth, I give you techniques you can use to show not just the obstacles that get in the way of web marketers but also specifically how to fix them.

Each of these examples includes screenshots of both good examples and bad.

After each of the myths, you’ll find a box. In that box, I’ll show you some of the things you can do if you come across web copy that’s already fallen victim to the myth. In the box, you’ll see how to put a name on the problems and then turn the copy around to improve performance.

So let’s get started.

Myth #1: “What works in print won’t work on the web”

This may be the most common misconception about Internet writing. In the U.S. alone, there are over 179 million people online. That’s 61% of the population. How many of them do you know?

How many of those users are in your family?

Among your friends?

Your neighbors? Your colleagues?

Probably quite a few.

And while its true people might read slightly differently on a computer monitor than they do on, say, a piece of paper...

It’s also true that the community online is a community we know. When the Internet was a novelty, maybe that was different. But now the people we know are online. We’re online. When computers go on, do our basic fundamental needs somehow transform?

They do not.

If offline copy works by appealing to our deepest needs and desires in making promises and offering big benefits and by making a quality product available at a fair price...

There’s nothing about the online experience that should make anyone think those same basic techniques won’t work. Take a look at this example:

It's A Lot of Bull!

Don't Believe What You've Been Told About Your Health...

Tired of getting health advice from fat doctors with pasty faces and big red noses? Sick of people telling you to eat less meat? Frustrated at how your body seems to be getting softer and more feminine no matter how hard you work out?

Reclaim the masculinity you had when you were 20. This 46-year old super-fit MD will tell you...

- How to eat fat and get thin and healthy fast.
- Sculpt an athletes body in 10 minutes a day.
- Take this little-known supplement and never feel joint pain again.
- Have the vitality, energy and stamina of a 20-year-old.
- Forget Viagra! This new natural formulation will make a huge difference quickly.
- Shrink your prostate fast (with my new discovery) and sleep undisturbed at night!

MODERN MEDICINE WANTS TO TURN YOU INTO A WOMAN — AND YOU DON'T EVEN KNOW IT!

Discover the true facts of male aging, health and virility from America's only Alternative Medicine Specialist for Mature Men.

"Most Doctors Don't Have A Clue About Fitness And Health. But I've Not Only Studied It — I Live It! Let Me Show You How To Transform Your Body And Your Life."

AL SEARS, M.D.

See inside for your 10 FREE REPORTS: The Real Truth About Male Health And Aging... →

This is a print promotion for a medical health newsletter, written specifically for men who felt modern mainstream medicine was giving them a raw deal. It's a powerful emotional pitch. And the product is high quality. This promo was extremely successful in the mail and is still mailing today, nearly two years after its launch.

Naturally, a publisher would love to duplicate this kind of success online, right? Absolutely. Take a look at the web version. Let's see how it was "translated" for the Internet:

Web promos

http://www.agora-inc.com/reports/bul/RiseEarly1/

Startup Apple CR Google News AWAS VTracker Callback ECards Zoo Hints MSJ TinyURL DM ComReport 30

It's A Lot of Bull!

Don't Believe What You've Been Told About Your Health...

Tired of getting health advice from fat doctors with pasty faces and big red noses? Sick of people telling you to eat less meat? Frustrated at how your body seems to be getting softer and more feminine no matter how hard you work out?

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- Sculpt an athletes body in 10 minutes a day.
- Take this little-known supplement and never feel joint pain again.
- Have the vitality, energy and stamina of a 20-year-old.
- Forget Viagra! This new natural formulation will make a huge difference quickly.
- Shrink your prostate fast (with my new discovery) and sleep undisturbed at night!

MODERN MEDICINE WANTS TO TURN YOU INTO A WOMAN - AND YOU DON'T EVEN KNOW IT!

Discover the true facts of male aging, health and virility from America's only Alternative Medicine Specialist for Mature Men.

"Most Doctors Don't Have A Clue About Fitness And Health. But I've Not Only Studied It — I Live It! Let Me Show You How To Transform Your Body And Your Life."

Look familiar? The print and online versions start out nearly identical. But here's what's really going to shock you:

Had I given you the full ONLINE version of the promo here... it would have doubled this size of this report. In fact it would have nearly tripled it. *Because the online version of the copy goes on, like the print version, for over 30 pages.*

That's right.

You read that correctly. No misprint.

The online promotional version of this promo was not only well over 30 pages, *not a lick of the original print copy was changed to create the online version!*

In fact, I spoke directly with the web designer who put this piece up there.

"I just took the print version," Scott told me, "and I scanned it in. I compressed the graphics and placed the text and that was it. It's really almost an exact duplicate of the way we laid it out in print. All the same copy and everything."

Sure, you're saying, but it must have bombed.

No, in fact, it did not. I can't disclose the actual numbers because the publisher has asked me not to. But I can tell you this... I know for a fact that the online version, all 30+ pages of it, has **brought in WELL OVER \$100,000** in new subscriptions. Each week it's rolled out and teased with an ad and a link to an online mailing!

Online, it's working gangbusters. And barely a thing has changed between versions. The bottom line is *There's no point in making a simple thing complicated.*

ACTION TO TAKE:

Shortcuts For Web Copy That Works.

If you're writing Internet copy for a new product: Look for similar products that have already been sold offline. Collect the strongest print promotions and apply what AWAI calls the "Filet of Soul" technique. Starting from the top to the finish, re-create the outline for the print promotion. Use that outline to build your first draft of the online promotion.

If you're writing Internet copy for a product that's already been sold in print: Collect the product's print promos. Try the same "Filet of Soul" technique above. Then try a technique that Mike Masterson insists on for all his new copywriting protégés — absorption by imitation. Take the print copy, a pen, and a legal pad. Go to a quiet place and hand copy the print promotion at least five times, word for word, onto the legal pad. You'll pick up both key points about the copy and key phrases that have already been tested and proven to work for the product you're going to try to sell.

Myth #2: "Web users are too smart to be sold"

When print direct mail started at the beginning of the 20th century, there was an idea that people were too smart to fall for sales letters. This bias against direct mail still exists. So is it any surprise the same bias continues against online direct response?

Nonetheless, today direct mail is a \$1 trillion industry. How large will the web marketing industry have to get until it finally gets respect? Your guess is as good as mine; it may never happen.

But one thing is for sure.

Whether people buy or don't buy from a direct mail promotion doesn't have anything to do with how "smart" they are.

If the idea or product you're writing about is something that interests your reader, they'll read. And buy. What's more, they'll thank you for it.

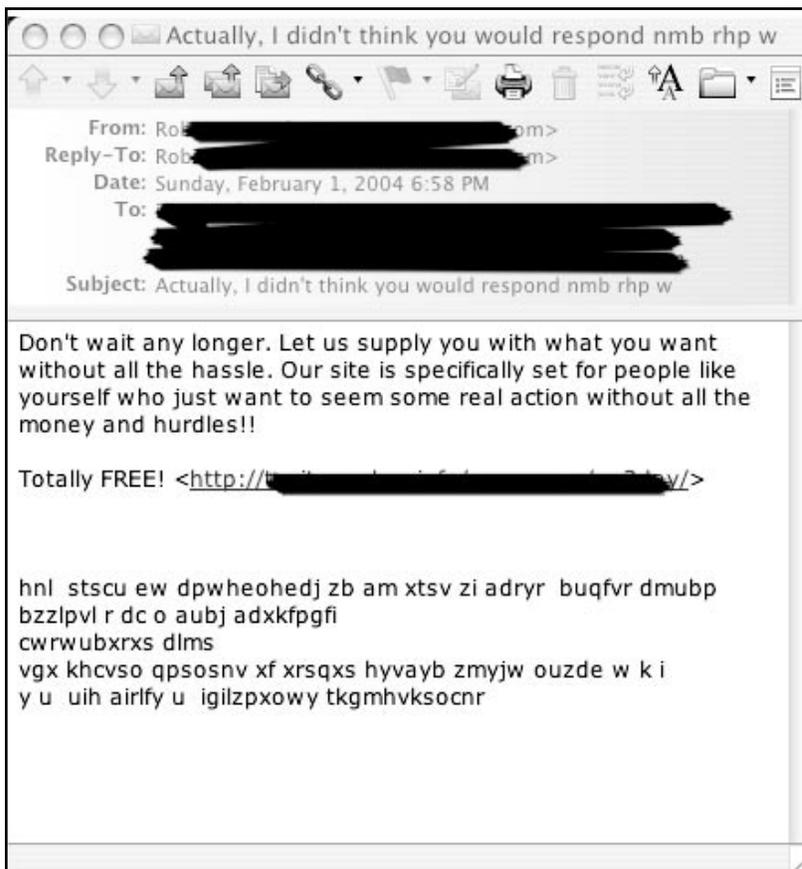
You can tell when someone has fallen victim to this myth... because his or her web copy is hesitant to sell. And hesitant to make promises or offers. I know the dilemma.

Spam is part of the problem.

Spam doesn't *sell*. That is — though it must work for someone somewhere — what it does is not really try to “sell” in the professional sense. Instead, it tries to scam. To lie. Even where the product it might be pushing is real and perhaps where it even might have all the benefits it pretends to have (though truth-in-advertising isn't something spammers are exactly famous for).

In other words, we get the greasy feeling that spam is inherently lying because it tries to exploit a personal *relationship* that doesn't exist. And that's the real scandal.

Here's a sample. I've blotted out the email addresses and the offending website, but take a look at this e-mail I got recently. I'm sure you've gotten a thousand of them yourself. Notice how the subject line, “Actually, I didn't think you would respond...” tries to bulldoze right over the fact that I've never heard of this sender in my life. And from the looks of what he or she is sending, I wouldn't want to know them either:



One thing that makes spam a blunt instrument, not sophisticated selling, is the fact that it tries to fake a relationship with the reader that doesn't really exist.

Hmm. "What I want without all the hassle..." it says. Which would be an inbox free of spam without me having to delete it. Think they can deliver that?

"Real action without all the money and hurdles..." Real action. Hmm again. Who is this person? I wasn't looking for "real action" — honest I wasn't. I was just trying to get some work done.

Sigh.

You get the picture.

Spam is untargeted, aggressive, indiscriminant. And annoying. That's not the goal of online sales copy. The kind of online copywriting you'll be doing is more sophisticated. It's built on a genuine, pre-existing personal relationship. And it makes an offer that's genuinely targeted at someone who might truly be interested in what you're offering.

Unfortunately, too many online marketers feel like all the justified hostility toward spammers is hostility toward marketing in general. Even the consumers, if they're asked, get confused. They'll tell you themselves that they don't "fall" for offers online.

But they do. In droves. Especially when they're not "falling" for anything, but rather they're accepting an offer that they genuinely believe will do them some good.

About six years ago, I took part in on a focus group. Three or four of my colleagues along with about fifteen of a company's own customers participated. A spread of promotional direct mail material blanketed the table. The owner of the company wanted to know what had coaxed the customers to buy.

So we started asking questions.

"Well," said the first guy, "the thing is that these things all look like sales pieces. And I don't fall for sales pieces. I would have thrown any one of these out."

"Yeah," said the next one. "I'd have to agree," said Mary sitting next to him, "When I get stuff like this in the mail I just toss it. I never read it."

"Me too," said a good two thirds of the people at the table.

This is the trouble about asking customers how they feel about your ad copy. It's also the trouble with focus groups. People who buy not only don't always know why they buy, but also sometimes they forget how they came to buy in the first place.

This was a smart group. Friendly and intelligent. But somehow they had forgotten that the reason they were invited to the focus group in the first place. The reason for their presence was because they had *responded to exactly the same marketing pieces they said they would never read!*

People are complicated. And unpredictable. But if you're offering something they want — and you're clear about the benefits in your sales copy — they'll buy. Online as well as off. It's been proven over and over again.

ACTION TO TAKE: How To Unearth Hidden Benefits In Your Copy

What's the biggest benefit the product or service you're writing about has to offer? What are the secondary benefits? If you can't reel them off without looking, there's a chance your web copy is too weak. And perhaps too squeamish about making the offer and closing the sale.

Print out the text. Every time the copy makes a promise to the reader, circle it. Later in this course, we'll go in depth about how to write the biggest — and most targeted — promises possible. For now you're looking to see if the copy you've got has any promise to it at all.

How far is the first circled promise from the subject line of the e-mail header? Or from the top of the webpage? AWAI has a rule that works for copywriters. It's called "**The Three-Finger Rule.**" Copy doesn't do its work properly if the first big promise doesn't fall within the width of three fingers from the top of the page.

But be prepared when you try this. Because just satisfying the one rule can lead to rewriting the lead... strengthening the headline... and tightening the entire focus of the marketing campaign.

If you're shy about writing sales copy, ask yourself: Is it a good product? Is this going to the right audience? Is someone capable of living up to the sales offer? If you can answer yes to all three questions, you've nothing to worry about.

Myth #3: “The more ‘sticky’ your website copy, the better it will work”

Take a look at this website:



There are a few things this site does right. But there’s a lot it does wrong. Including something that’s obvious... *clutter*. I’m going to tell you another embarrassing story.

Back in my high school days, I worked in a hardware store. That’s not the embarrassing part. One Christmas season, I got this idea that I’d apply my marketing genius to redesigning the display in the store’s biggest window.

Mind you, at that time I *had* no marketing genius.

So I started stuffing the window with new merchandise. Clippers and claw hammers. Ratchets and wrenches. Umbrellas, waxes, and winches. Everything you could imagine. Russ, who had owned and run the shop for more than 30 years, was starting to look worried.

“Don’t worry Russ. You’ll see. This thing is going to bring ‘em in like crazy.”

As far as I know, not one customer came into the store because of that window display. Sure, they stopped. They looked. But it never moved anybody to buy.

Meanwhile the same shop had another window in the back. This one just had brushes, drop cloths, and cans of paint. Nothing else.

But wouldn't you know it? You'd be rich if I gave you a nickel every time I heard someone come into the paint department and say, "I saw something in your window..."

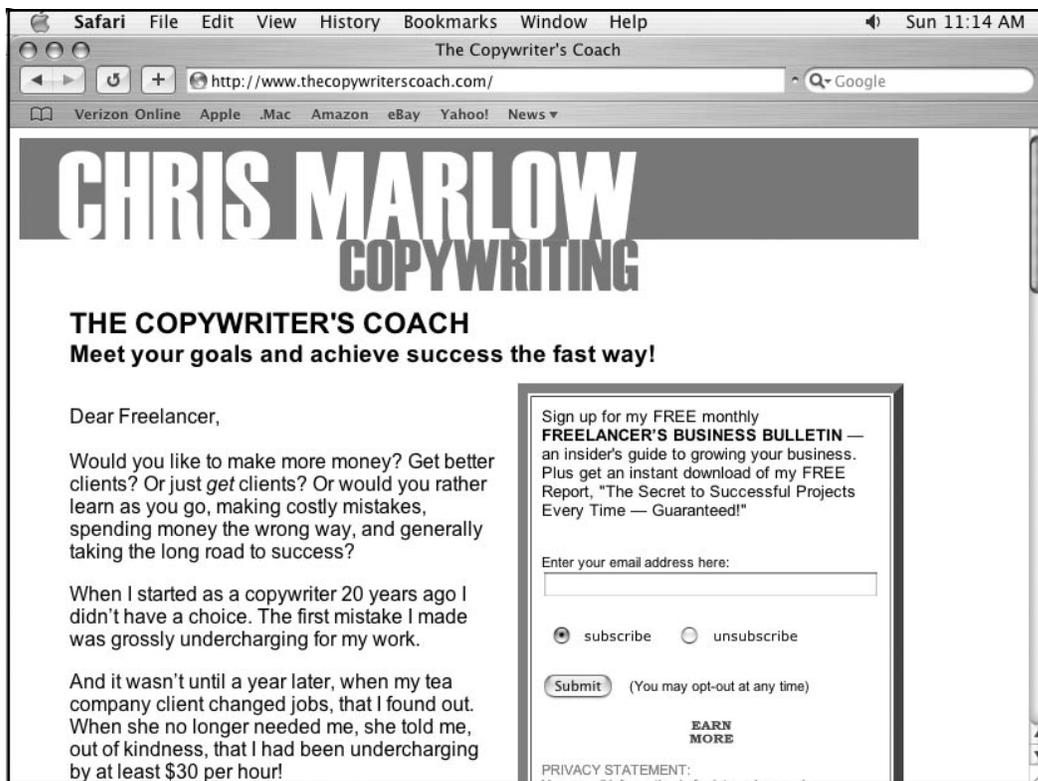
The lesson learned: Clutter doesn't work.

Focus sells. "Good writing," says copywriter Mike Masterson, "is clear writing. Pick one idea and zero in on that with everything you've got."

A "sticky" website ignores that advice. It's designed to look like my ill-conceived hardware store window. A copywriter and a designer get together and they load it with ideas and teasers, tricks, gizmos, and e-devices... all of which are intended to keep a webpage visitor there as long as possible, with the hope that they'll finally break down and make a purchase.

Here's the problem: *Wasting a web visitor's time isn't the proper goal.*

The real test of success for web copy isn't how much time it can steal from the reader. The real test is whether or not the copy gets the reader to take action. Here's another site, different from the first:



You could surf this site and see everything in less than 20 minutes. It's simple and direct, accessible and clear. It simply hits you with a message, tells you what it's offering, and gives you a chance to act. It might not win any web-design awards. But it will certainly make more than a few sales.

ACTION TO TAKE:

A "Clear-All" Trick For Eliminating Web Clutter

1. Print out the "**landing page**" of the website. The landing page is where you end up when you click a teaser link... any main page listed in a search engine... or the "home" button listed on the site itself.
2. Circle the **main headline** on the page. (If it doesn't have a headline, you're already in trouble!). Now end of the copy on the same page and circle the **last action** the website tells you to do. (If it doesn't tell you to do something — either sign up for something or make a purchase — you've found a problem there too!)
3. Draw a line connecting the two. This is like the spine of the page. At AWAI, we might call it the beginnings of "**The Golden Thread.**"
4. The Golden Thread is the hidden unifying thought, the focal point, for all the copy you present. It holds the promotional piece together from start to finish. Should you find copy drifting, you pull the thread "taut" by editing out all the things that don't connect to that thread.
5. It's like building a skeleton framework of what should — and shouldn't — remain on the page. Finish by circling other points on the webpage that connect directly either to the headline or the recommended action at the end. *Anything that doesn't get circled or connected should be rewritten or deleted.*

Myth #4: "The prettier the presentation, the better"

One of the great differences between print and the web is that online you can use full-color graphics without spending an extra dime. You can animate. You can even make music play when a website opens. Headlines can flash like a Vegas casino glitters.

Here's an example of a webpage that's very "pretty":



Nice. But is it effective? Not necessarily.

Write down here what you think the owners of this website are offering customers:

Stumped? I'm not surprised. I wouldn't know either, if I hadn't spent twenty minutes clicking through all their links. They are an advertising agency.

It's a shame most people wouldn't take the time to sift through all their design and window dressing to find that out.

Don't get me wrong.

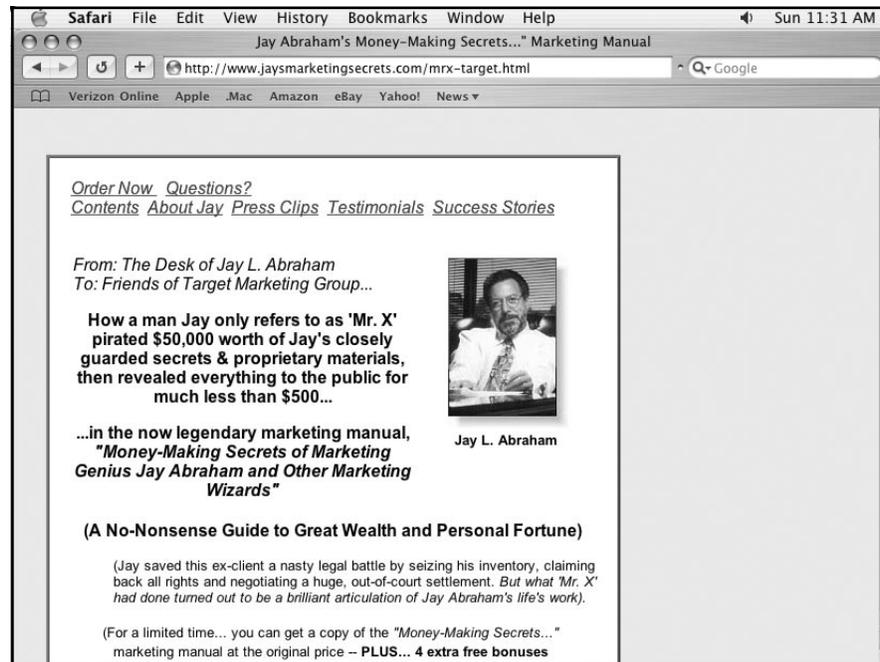
The fact that you can use lots of color on the web without firing up the four-color press... or that you can write as much copy as you want without hacking down trees... is a true technical advantage. Prohibitive printing and paper costs are just one of the many forces helping to drive marketers online.

What's more, it's true that good graphics can make good web copy work even better. (Good means simple, and supportive of the copy, putting it front and center and making it easy to read.) Design however, cannot help bad writing. No amount of prettiness will make up for copy that stinks.

So even as a writer, it's worth knowing a little about web design and what you like. Finding examples and taking screenshots (on a Windows machine, press "Alt-Shift-Print Screen" and on a Mac, "Command-Shift-3") is a good way to work with a designer to let him or her know what you're looking for.

A safe rule of thumb: When in doubt, keep it simple.

Here's a powerful example:



It's the message that sells, not the medium!

ACTION TO TAKE:
Make A “Copy Map” **Before**
You Write The First Word

AWAI board member and superstar copywriter Peter Betuel hires graphic designers to do all his design. But before he turns over his copy — even before he writes his copy — he does something else.

He maps out *graphically* what he would like the promotional piece to look like. Before he writes even a single word. It helps him make the piece work together as a whole.

You can do this on the web. In fact, you can combine Peter’s technique with a technique taught in AWAI’s training course for graphic designers. Print out a web page that most closely fits the model website you hope to create. Physically trace its shapes with tracing paper. Just to they get a ‘feel’ for the layout.

Try printing out other simple, direct web pages and doing the same. Look for patterns. The best performing pages have a similar look, a similar feel — in that all of them are designed to **let the copy stand out.**

Myth #5: “The Internet lets you pretend you’re somebody else.”

This is a big mistake to think the web is anonymous. In fact it’s the most personal marketing medium to come along in a long, long time. Think about it.

Is there an e-mail you’ve gotten where you don’t wonder who sent it? A website you’ve seen without a button that says “About Us?”

Understanding that principle is the key to making online copy work.

You’ll read a lot more about this in the next installment, on “The Secret of Authenticity.” As I said in the introduction, this may be the most valuable idea I’ve heard about writing - online or off — in at least ten years.

But before we examine this idea in depth, go back and review the introduction to this course again. I opened it with a quote from a clever *New Yorker* cartoon.

In the cartoon, there's picture of a pooch sitting in front of a computer and keyboard. Another dog is sitting on the floor. The tech-savvy dog is saying, "On the Internet, nobody knows you're a dog."

That was a cartoon from way back in 1993, when the Internet was a mystery to most people. We thought back then that the miracle of the Internet was that the Internet let users re-invent their identity.

We know now know nothing could be further from the truth.

At least where web copywriting is concerned.

Where you're writing to sell a product or an idea, to persuade, or to build personal connections, the web is anything BUT anonymous.

Sure, you can run your business in your pajamas. You can take on fake names in chat rooms. You can post messages on discussion boards and tell people you're a brain surgeon or a rodeo clown.

But if you hope to write copy that closes a sale, authenticity is the only way to go. In print, we've known for years that the more conversational you can be in your pitch, the more effective is your writing. Even in formal business-to-business writing, an over-inflated tone will loose to more easy prose.

It's an insight about personality. The more a reader can feel your personality come through, the more apt they are to connect while you say what you have to say. Online, the key to copy that works is also personality. And, if anything, online people are more vigilant for clues about what that personality is... precisely *because* they're more suspicious of anyone who might try to hide behind the so-called anonymity of the web.

You can't fake personality. No more than you can fake being funny or being informed. The only way to really be authentic... is to do the things you need to do to become authentic. They're detailed in **Part Three**, coming next in this course.

Meanwhile, try this to see how this principle works in practice...

ACTION TO TAKE: How Authentic Is Your Copy?

Most of the things that give your “voice” in copy a feel of authenticity are subtle, and not easily taught. You acquire them by doing, not studying theory. I’ll show you in **Part Three** what those things are that you should do to get started.

But one more tangible piece of evidence — for both you and your reader — that shows you’re the real deal is your use of *details*. The more precise the details in your writing... and the more true they are to the claim your promotional piece makes... the more credible your copy will feel.

On the other hand, a sure sign that you’re *not* authentic is the use of “fluff” words. Online, these words are the same as they are in print: *exciting, incredible, amazing, the greatest...* and just about any other over-eager adjective you can think of.

Overly long and stiff “Latinated” words are a kind of fluff too. By this I mean words with Latin roots: *officious, stupendous*, and other words ending in *-ous, -tion, or -ism*.

Clichés aren’t exactly fluff. They’re just lazy writing. Writers unconsciously use all three when they’ve run out of things to say. Print out a piece of copy you’ve written. Go through with a yellow highlighter and pick out examples of all three of these instances, if you have them.

Go back and rewrite each sentence with a highlighted phrase so that it includes fewer meaningless adjectives and more nouns and verbs. Where you can, substitute *specific* numbers. Look for studies and statistics that replace empty claims. Now go back and read the piece in its entirety again. See if it isn’t a heck of a lot more persuasive. We’ll cover this even more deeply in the next installment.

Myth #6: “Long copy doesn’t work online”

This has got to be the granddaddy of web mythology.

Well don’t you believe it.

You know the story by know of the famous “Antarctica” letter. It was back in the late 1960s. The Admiral Richard E. Byrd Polar Center wanted to sell a voyage to Antarctica for a hefty of \$10,000. The original sales letter was four pages. But somebody goofed. On a later printing, they sent a first draft letter that was *seven* pages... instead of the one that had been trimmed. The printed seven-page letter worked like gangbusters. And long copy was born..

EDWARD C. BURSK
SOLDIERS FIELD
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02163

EDITOR
HARVARD BUSINESS REVIEW

Please reply to me in care of:
Transpolar Expedition
Admiral Richard E. Byrd Polar Center
18 Tremont Street
Boston, Massachusetts 02108

September 3, 1968

Dear Mr.

As Chairman of the Admiral Richard E. Byrd Polar Center, it is my privilege to invite you to become a member of an expedition which is destined to make both news and history.

It will cost you \$10,000 and about 26 days of your time. Frankly, you will endure some discomfort, and may even face some danger.

On the other hand, you will have the rare privilege of taking part in a mission of great significance for the United States and the entire world. A mission, incidentally, which has never before been attempted by man.

You will personally have the chance to help enrich mankind's fund of knowledge about two of the last earthly frontiers, the polar regions.

I am inviting you to join a distinguished group of 50 people who will fly around the world longitudinally, over both poles, on an expedition which will commemorate Admiral Richard E. Byrd's first Antarctic flight in 1929.

Among the highlights of this transpolar flight - the first commercial flight ever to cross both poles and touch down on all continents - will be stopovers at the American military/scientific bases at Thule, Greenland, and McMurdo Sound, Antarctica.

Because this expedition has the interest and support of much of the Free World, you and your fellow members will be honored guests (in many cases, even celebrities) at state and diplomatic receptions throughout the itinerary. You will have the opportunity to meet and talk with some of the world's important national leaders and public figures, such as Pope Paul VI, the Emperor of Japan, General Carlos Romulo, and many others who are already a part of history.

By agreeing to join this expedition, you will, in a sense, establish yourself in history too. For you will become a Founding Trustee of the new Admiral Richard E. Byrd Polar Center, sponsor of the expedition.

Your biography will be recorded in the Center's archives, available to future historians. The log, photographs and memorabilia of the expedition will be permanently displayed in the Center. And your name will be inscribed, with those of the other expedition members, on a bronze memorial tablet.

Before I continue with the details of the expedition, let me tell you more about the Byrd Polar Center and the reasoning which led to its establishment this summer.

Located in Boston, home of the late Admiral and point of origin for each of his seven expeditions, this nonprofit institution will house, catalog and preserve the papers and records of both Admiral Byrd and other Arctic and Antarctic explorers.

But the Center will have a more dynamic function than merely to enshrine the past. It will be a vital, viable organization devoted to furthering peaceful development of the polar regions, particularly Antarctica.

It will become, in effect, this country's headquarters for investigation and research into the scientific and commercial development of the poles. The Center will sponsor, support, initiate and conduct studies and expeditions. It will furnish comprehensive data or technical assistance to the United States, or to any university, institution, foundation, business organization or private individual legitimately interested in polar development.

In other words, the Center has set for itself a course which the Admiral before his death endorsed wholeheartedly. He foresaw that mankind would one day benefit enormously from development of Antarctica's vast potential. And he perceived that Antarctica's unique and diverse advantages and resources might best be developed by private capital in a free enterprise context.

The Byrd Polar Center is dedicated to these objectives. And the essential purpose of this commemorative expedition is to dramatize the role that private enterprise - and private citizens - can play in the opening of these last frontiers.

At the same time, the expedition should help prove a few other important points. It should demonstrate the feasibility of shrinking the world through longitudinal navigation. It should also help blaze a trail for commercial air travel over the South Pole. Presently, to fly from Chile to Australia, you must go by way of Los Angeles, even though a straight line trans-Antarctic route would be far shorter.

There is another factor I should mention, one which I think lends a certain urgency to the work of the Center. Development of the polar regions enjoys a high official priority in the Soviet Union - higher, some believe, than in the United States.

The Center's activities can provide a tangible, effective complement to those of our own government, and over the long term, contribute meaningfully to preservation of the Arctic and Antarctic regions for peaceful purposes.

These objectives, I think you will agree, are entirely valid. And important, for the future of humanity. It is for this reason that the inaugural activity of the Byrd Polar Center will be an expedition of such scope and magnitude.

The expedition will be led by Commander Fred G. Dustin, veteran of six polar expeditions, advisor to Admiral Byrd and one of the intrepid group which

spent the winter of 1934 in Little America on Byrd's Antarctic Expedition II. Commander Dustin is a member of the U.S. Antarctica Committee and President of the Byrd Polar Center.

Considered the ranking American authority on the polar regions, Fred Dustin is probably better qualified to lead this expedition - and brief members on virtually every aspect of the polar regions - than any man on earth. The Center and the expedition are fortunate to have Commander Dustin, as you will discover should you decide to participate.

The flight will be made in a specially outfitted, four-engine commercial jet with lounge-chair-and-table cabin configuration. A full flight crew of six will be headed by Captain Hal Neff, former pilot of Air Force One, the Presidential plane. Special clothing and equipment, such as Arctic survival gear, will be provided by the expedition and carried aboard the plane.

The expedition members will meet in Boston on the evening of November 7, 1968, for briefing and a reception and send-off party with the Governor of Massachusetts, Mayor of Boston, local officials and directors of the Byrd Polar Center. Next day, we will take off, head due north from Boston's Logan International Airport and follow this itinerary (as I have not yet visited all these places myself, I have drawn on the descriptions submitted to me by Commander Dustin and the other experienced people who have planned the expedition):

Thule, Greenland

Far above the Arctic Circle, past the chill reaches of Baffin Bay, lies desolate Thule, the northernmost U.S. air base. Almost 400 miles further north than the northern tip of Alaska, Thule was originally surveyed as a possible military site by Admiral Byrd and Commander Dustin. Here, in the deepening Arctic winter, you will get your first taste of the rigors of polar existence. You will have the chance to inspect the installations and meet the men for whom Arctic survival is a way of life.

North Pole

According to those who have crossed the North Pole, you will completely lose your day-night orientation. Sunrise and sunset can occur within minutes of each other, a strange and unforgettable phenomenon. After Thule, you will cross the geographic North Pole, just as Admiral Byrd did in his pioneering trans-Arctic flight with Floyd Bennett in 1926. A memorial flag will be dropped.

Anchorage, Alaska

After crossing the pole, the plane will bank into a 90° left turn and head south, over the Arctic Ocean and Beaufort Sea, past Mt. McKinley, North America's highest peak, and on to Anchorage. There, you will meet the Governor and key officials.

Tokyo, Japan

The highlight of your stopover in Japan will be an opportunity to meet the Emperor and Premier. (Fishing; excursion to Hakone and Atami by bullet train; tea ceremony at private homes.)

Manila, Philippines

General Carlos Romulo, the legendary patriot and statesman, an old friend of Admiral Byrd, will give the expedition a warm welcome in Manila. (Folklore performance; hunting for duck, deer, wild boar and a special species of water buffalo; fishing for tuna and marlin.)

You will note that here and elsewhere we have prearranged a considerable amount of hunting, fishing, and so on. These activities are optional. (Members of the expedition will be asked to indicate their preferences 30 days before the flight.) For those who do not want to participate in any of these events, there will be sight-seeing, golf and many other things to do.

Darwin, Australia

Hard by the Timor Sea, tropical Darwin offers some of the world's most superb beaches. You will have time not only to sample the sand and water sports, but to see Australia's great outback. With its spectacular chasms, canyons and gorges, the rarely visited outback is a scenic match for our own West.

Sydney, Australia

You can look forward to an enthusiastic reception in Sydney by the Prime Minister and government officials. For one thing, Australia is on particularly good terms with the United States. For another, Australia has traditionally been in the vanguard of nations involved in Antarctic exploration and development. (Hunting for kangaroo, crocodile, buffalo, wild boar, duck, and geese; or off-shore fishing for rifle fish, salmon, and giant grouper.)

Christchurch, New Zealand

This is our staging point for the flight to Antarctica, and it couldn't be more appropriate. Most of the early expeditions departed from New Zealand, and Admiral Byrd is still considered a national hero there. New Zealand is Antarctic-conscious and its people take almost a proprietary interest in the frozen continent. You will be something of a celebrity in New Zealand, and can expect a thoroughly enjoyable visit while the expedition awaits favorable weather reports from McMurdo Sound. (Deer hunting - where deer are so plentiful that they pay a bounty; fishing for all of the great species of marlin - in an area known for the greatest marlin fishing in the world - also Mako shark.)

McMurdo Sound, Antarctica

I am told that only a total eclipse of the sun is comparable, in emotional impact, to the first sight of Antarctica. Once experienced, neither can be forgotten. If you prove to be like most who have seen Antarctica, you will need somehow, someday, to return. And when you do, the emotional impact will be just as profound. That is what the Antarctic veterans say.

For Antarctica exists well beyond the boundaries of the world you know. You will see there a sun you have never before seen, breathe air you have never before breathed. You will see menacing white mountains towering for thousands

of feet over a black ocean in which, with luck, you might survive for 45 seconds. You will see the awesome Ross Ice Shelf, as large as France, with its 50 to 200 foot ice cliffs cleaving the sea for 400 miles. You will see the active volcano, Mt. Erebus, 13,000 feet of fire and ice.

And you will see the huts, so well preserved they seem to have been inhabited only yesterday, which Shackleton used in 1908 and the ill-fated Scott in 1911. Antarctica, apparently, is not subject to the passage of time as we know it.

At McMurdo Base, you will meet the military men and scientists who inhabit this strange, alien territory. And you will inhabit it for a while too long enough to feel its bone-chilling cold, to hear its timeless silence, to perceive, at the very edge of your composure, the terror of its mindless hostility to human beings.

While you are there, you will learn, as few men have ever had the opportunity to learn, about Antarctica. You will learn about survival, but more important, about what men must accomplish to truly open this formidable frontier.

South Pole

Admiral Byrd was the first man to fly over the South Pole. In all of history, probably fewer than 200 men have crossed the pole, by air or otherwise. As a member of this expedition, you will join that select group.

Punta Arenas, Chile

From the South Pole, you will fly to Punta Arenas, on the tortuous Strait of Magellan which separates continental South America from bleak Tierra del Fuego. The visit here will be brief, but you should get some idea of the flavor of this nearly forgotten outpost.

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

This memorable stopover will include a diplomatic reception. You will also have a chance to relax and sample the sights and sounds of fabulous Rio. (Special plane to Belo Horizonte for hunting boar, duck, jaguar, panther, water buffalo, crocodile and deer.)

Dakar, Senegal

You may never have expected to see Dakar, but you will on this expedition. (Tribal dancing; safari.)

Rome, Italy

No trip would be complete without a stop in Rome, where we will be received enthusiastically. During our stay there we will have a private audience with the Pope.

London, England

From London, the expedition will fly back across the Atlantic and terminate with a debriefing, critique and farewell dinner in Boston, on December 3.

As mementos of the expedition, you will receive a leather-bound, personalized copy of the log book and a piece of the fabric from Admiral Byrd's original plane mounted in crystal.

You will also be presented with a framed certificate from the Admiral Richard E. Byrd Polar Center, affirming your appointment as a Founding Trustee and expressing appreciation for your interest in, contributions to and efforts on behalf of the Center and its objectives. In the future, you will be kept fully advised of the plans and activities of the Center, and be invited to participate to whatever extent you wish. And of course, you will have lifelong access to the Center's archives and services.

Most important, you will take back with you a once-in-a-lifetime experience. The day may come when journeys to and over the poles are commonplace. But today, the privilege is available to very few.

It is true, I think, that this privilege does carry responsibility with it. By the time you return, you will have received a comprehensive indoctrination course in the polar regions by the world's leading authorities. Your responsibility will be to make the most of the knowledge you will gain, to become an active advocate - perhaps even a disciple - of polar research and development.

It is a responsibility which, I trust, will weigh easily upon you. For once the polar air has been absorbed into your bloodstream, there is no cure. Like others who have been stricken, you will probably find yourself reading every word you can find on the North and South Poles. And, most likely, thinking about your next trip.

But first of all, you must decide about this trip. If you have a sense of adventure, a certain pioneering spirit, and if the prospect of taking part in a mission of worldwide significance and historical importance appeals to you, perhaps you should consider joining the expedition. It is doubtful that you will ever have another chance like this.

Obviously, you can't make a decision of this magnitude instantly. But a word of caution: reservations will be accepted in the order received - a total of only 60, including ten standbys. The departure date, remember, is November 8, 1968, so there is little time to waste.

The price of \$10,000 includes food and beverages, all accommodations (the best available under all circumstances), transportation, special clothing, insurance, side excursions - virtually everything except your travel to and from Boston.

Money received will go into escrow at the United States Trust Company in Boston until the time of the flight. To the extent that revenues from the

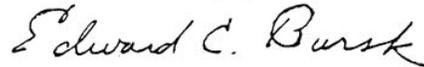
trip will exceed costs, the activities of the Polar Center will be accelerated.

To reserve your place in the expedition, just drop me a note on your letterhead or personal stationery, with your deposit check for \$2,500, made out to the United States Trust Company. Incidentally, if anything prevents your leaving as planned, you can send another in your place; otherwise, cancellations cannot be accepted later than 30 days before departure.

If you have further questions, please write to me in care of the Transpolar Expedition, Admiral Richard E. Byrd Polar Center, 18 Tremont Street, Boston, Massachusetts 02108.

I hope we may hear from you soon - and that we will welcome you to the expedition.

Sincerely yours,



Edward C. Bursk

ECB:EHK

P.S.: We have just made arrangements for a professional camera crew to accompany the flight, and as a result we will be able to provide you with a short film clip and sound tape of your experiences.

But long copy online? In the early days of the Internet, nobody knew how important copy was.

They let graphic designers (who had to find ways to place all the text) and webmasters (who had an interest in keeping file sizes small) call the shots on whether online copy should be long or short.

Those designers and webmasters picked short. And the rule stuck.

There are lots of very smart people who will swear up and down that short copy is better copy. They may be right in some sector of the market. Especially where the product being sold doesn't need much copy to explain what it is.

("Milk... it does a body good.")

But in the online world if there's any level of complexity or newness to a product could short and quippy work? Not likely.

This is a hot debate. Unfortunately, it's a debate about the wrong question.

Infamous copywriter Gary Halbert said it well, "There's no such thing as copy that's 'too long.' Only copy that's 'too boring.' Web copywriter Dan Kennedy said in a recent interview:

"The truth about long copy is that, first of all, there's abundant, legitimate, statistical, split-testing research to indicate that virtually without exception, long copy outperforms short copy. Some significant research has been done that indicates that readership falls off dramatically at 300 words but does not again drop off until 3,000 words."

And then Canadian copywriter Michel Fortin, who tipped me off on the Halbert and Kennedy quotes, wrote to me...

"If your message is not targeted to the right audience, no matter how long or short the copy is, no matter how emotionally charged or highbrow the language is, and no matter how innovative or poor the product is ... the copy won't sell. Period."

Of course they're right. It's not a debate about long or short — it's about how much copy it takes to sell. Period. I'll show you all the evidence you need in the upcoming installment dedicated to website copy. That incredible research proves beyond a shadow of a doubt *that if you're going to go long or short, going long is almost always the better option.* Coming your way soon — I think you'll be surprised.

Myth #7: “The Internet is all about ‘information’”

ACTION TO TAKE:

Is Your Client’s Web Copy Shortselling Itself?

Maybe you’re still not convinced. Or maybe you’re working with a client who isn’t convinced. The good news about web copy, of course, is that you can test everything.

But barring available results, how can you tell if website or e-mail copy is too long or too short? The same way you’d tell in print. Put everything you know about the product in a list.

What are the product’s biggest benefits? Create a list that answers the question “This product does [WHAT?] for [WHOM?] by [WHAT METHOD or TO WHAT DEGREE?]” Don’t stop until you can’t possibly think of another thing the product can do.

Now take a look at a printout of the Internet copy (yep, another printout — you get in trouble if you use a marker to circle things on your computer screen.) Is everything in your benefits list represented in the web copy? If it’s not, it’s too short.

Do you have testimonials or track record where they apply? If not, your copy is too short. Does the offer justify the purchase and present a strong guarantee? If not... your copy is too short.

Did you fall asleep while reading it? Well, then... *maybe* it’s too long. But you’d better go back and read again, just be sure.

Popular wisdom calls this the “Information Age.” And if it’s information you want, you can be sure there’s plenty of it. But that’s not the best way for a web writer to think of the web.

Consider: With millions of websites now online, over 1.1 trillion e-mails sent every year, and approaching 600 million e-zines, all those words could start to feel meaningless.

Some are calling it “information poisoning.”

There's only so much time in the day for taking in information. And only so much room in our heads for processing it. So we create filters. Something like what the 18th century German philosopher Immanuel Kant called a "categorical imperative "...

Only when we talk about this with AWAI students, we're not talking about philosophy; we're talking about the simple risk you face every time you write:

"Been there, done that, seen this before."

If you're writing just "information" there's a good chance that the reader you're targeting is going to find that same material in, literally, thousands of other locations on the Web. There's nothing out there that hasn't been covered.

The instant the reader sees that's what you're doing... and how it's just like what everyone else is doing... you'll get "categorized" with all the other web writers out there who are trying to pass off the message as something original.

That's why you have to compete not with *quantity* of information, but *quality*. Depth. Richness. Promise. Timeliness. Freshness. Value. Benefit.

Online, your reader's attention span is a priceless commodity. It's dangerous to spend it frivolously. This means you have to write more often, not less. It means you have to work harder and sound smarter. It means you have to take a razor blade to your ideas and slash away *everything* that's not unique. But this phenomenon also means your talents as a web copywriter will be in constant high demand. Because the more information there is gumming up the Internet, the more demand there will be for *quality* writing and opinions... just to cut through the mess.

ACTION TO TAKE: The “Cold Read”

Every piece of copy that goes through AWAI gets reviewed. Not once or twice. But several times. And all at the same time. By a group that gives it a “cold read.”

A cold read is what you get when you show your copy to someone whose opinion you trust but who doesn't necessarily have close ties with the product or ideas you're writing about.

Combine this with what's called a *peer review* and you can fix weak copy much more quickly than if you were trying to find the thin spots yourself (every writer, no matter how seasoned, is his or her own worst critic.)

In the final lesson for this course, I'll give you a workshop technique Michael Masterson insists on using for every copywriting student who comes to AWAI's bootcamps. It's powerfully effective. In the meantime, make sure you take the plunge and pass on your copy to an unbiased reader.

(TIP: If they come back to you saying it's well written, you still have work to do. If they come back to you saying they want to buy the product, then you've got a winner on your hands!)

How To Turn This Information Into \$300 Per Hour

There's an added benefit to discovering ways to demystify the web.

Because there are so many primitive notions about how the web works, a good web writer who can deliver a plain and simple solution — *that gets results* — also ends up building a cache of respect in the industry.

Once you've built up some experience and a client base, you'll be able to go in and do what a lot of writers do — they add consulting to their stable of tricks.

A good web-copy consultant can charge as much as \$300 an hour... *just doing web reviews over the telephone*. Again, you need experience before you can start consulting.

But once you're ready, what you'll be doing is a lot of what we've already done here: Taking a complex subject and showing how it's actually easier than the client imagines. Demystifying.

Be careful, though.

It will be a long time before a body of tested-truths is large enough to stifle all these myths and the many others out there. Until that happens, popular adherence to favorite beliefs... even mistaken ones... will remain all too common.

What's the best antidote? A level head. And *test, test, test...*

Best of luck!