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Helping organizations drive revenue and generate profits through stronger business communications

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8 Sales Writing Mistakes

Mistake #1. Open weak. Begin with a statement like, “Thank you for your time on the phone today.” Be polite and boring! You want to compel them to read! If you’re trying to grab their attention, go for the gusto! Start with strong, clear benefit statements like, “Your attendees will thank you! You’ll make their life easier by selecting a hotel right there—in the airport. Easy in, easy out. No hassle and immediate transportation cost savings for you and them! Oh... and don’t forget to tell the bellman to bring their baggage right to their room!” Even if you discussed these ideas with your prospect on the phone today, forget the standard “thank you” and focus on what they can enjoy because of your offer.

Mistake #2. Focus on the stuff that matters to you. Forget about them. Use the word “I” a lot. Your sales letter is not your life story nor is it a narrative of everything you’d like (I’d appreciate it, I recommend, I suggest, ad naseum). It’s easy to appear self-centered, selfish and egocentric when your message is filled with “I” words. A good rule of thumb is to use double the amount of “you” and “your” words for every “I” or “we” in your message.

Mistake #3. Ramble. Write for the sake of writing. Every effective sales letter has a purpose. Whether it’s to close a sale, pique interest, get an appointment, motivate them to accept your phone call, whatever it is, if you don’t clearly know what you want from your message, you won’t get it. Before you write, pre-write. Ask yourself: Why am I writing? What do I want to accomplish? Scribble that answer down on a piece of paper. After you write your sales letter, see if you met your goal.

Mistake #4. Don’t ask for action. Let them guess. If I had a dollar for every time someone closes an email or sales letter, and doesn’t tell the reader what to do next, or what the writer will do next, I’d be on my yacht sipping champagne off the coast of Monaco. Always ask yourself (when you’re pre-writing, thinking through your purpose for writing, is a good time): What will the next step in this sales process be? How will I make it clear to my reader? Make this action step compelling, and you’ve made your job easy!

Mistake #5. Tell them you’ll call in a few days to see if they received the materials you sent. Now there is a motivating reason to accept your phone call if I’ve heard one! First, date the action. Tell them exactly what day you’ll call to follow up. They probably won’t be waiting by the phone, breathlessly awaiting your call. It will give you a great opener, however, and show your responsiveness and reliability when you call and say, “Hi Ms Prospect. This is Michael, and I promised to follow up with you today.” Second, why should they talk with you to tell you they received your stuff? Give them a reason that matters to them to talk with you. In your email or sales letter, write, “I’ll call you September 9, to talk more about your company’s insurance needs and to see how we can offer your people the absolute most comprehensive and reliable plan at the best cost possible.”

Mistake #6. Use fancy, multi-syllabic words. Show them how well you’ve learned to use the thesaurus so you don’t repeat the same word in a letter. Years ago, *The Wall Street Journal* ran a great article about using “The Conversational Test.” It is even more true today. Impress people with what you know, not the fancy words you know. Anyone can go to the-saurus.com and find the bigger word. Forget it! Use the clear, concise, conversational word to connect with your prospect. And don’t be intimidated by Mr. VIP’s title. Prefer specific

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8 Sales Writing Mistakes *continued*

words that make a point and to express your point. It's okay to use the same word in the same paragraph by the way. If your client calls the meeting, a meeting, why call it a conference, workshop, symposium, or convention? Use their word over and over!

Mistake #7. Data dump. Tell them about every feature of your product or service. You may be in love with your product, idea or service but your prospect is in love with making his business or life run more efficiently or more effectively. Talk more about the benefits of your offer to your reader, not the facts and features of what you're selling. And only write about the benefits that matter to that prospect. No sense in telling baby boomers, for instance, that you have the best financial plan to help them save for their kid's college education. Too late for most of those boomers (their kids are already out of college!) yet a terrific benefit for Gen X. Customize and personalize every sales letter.

Mistake #8. Apologize. Put yourself into legal jeopardy. Even if there was a delay in getting the materials to the client, avoid the temptation to begin with, "Sorry for the delay"! In fact, an apology — in writing — makes the writer feel better about a situation that he or she caused. It's rarely helpful to the reader. Additionally, writing, "I'm sorry about the inconvenience we caused you" is really bad because you've now acknowledged responsibility for your mistake. (Do you know how expensive that inconvenience can be in court?) When you write, always, always, always focus on solution. If you want to apologize verbally, that's up to you. In writing, start strong and stay strong. Focus on solution and you won't be "sorry"!

For more tips, or to schedule Sue Hershkowitz-Coore, CSP to speak at your next meeting, please send an email to Sue@SpeakerSue.com.

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