



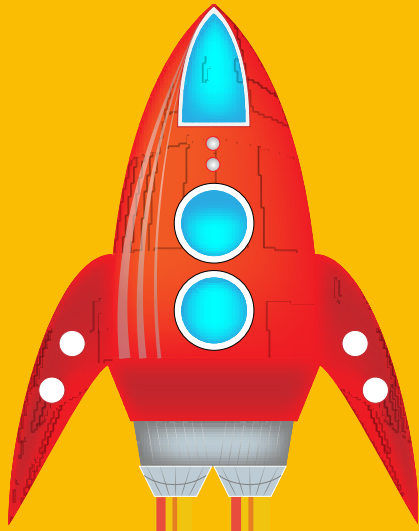
INTRODUCTION TO COPYWRITING

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INSIGHT: COPYWRITING

Get To Know Copywriting

If you want people to do a certain task, perform a specific action, or think of something in a particular way, you have to sell them on the idea or undertaking. Selling is not only for products and services. It's also for ideas, methodologies, arguments, and even people.

Each time you get someone, or a group of people, to do or think what you'd like them to do, you've performed a function of sales. Do this through the medium of written words, and you've got the building blocks of a copywriter. Copywriting is a specific function in the broader repertoire of written communications. The function of copywriting is to get a person or group to perform an action.

As copywriters, we consistently develop the craft (not art) of selling people on an idea, product, service, or person. We focus primarily on developing this skill of getting people, groups, and organisations to perform specific actions by selling them on the merits of the process and the outcome.

Copywriting: Enter With Wisdom

Let's think for a minute about why global firms and political organisations hire a copywriter. These institutions have the planet's smartest people working for them. They've also got access to a huge wealth of resources.

So why do they hire copywriters to work on projects that are seemingly simple, like generating a header for a brochure, or writing three paragraphs for a report, or proofreading and editing (there's a difference) a document? If anybody who speaks a language and loves reading and writing can become a copywriter, then surely any of a number of people within these institutions would be able to do the job. After all, just about every job today requires applicants to have 'excellent communication skills.'

Large firms (this also applies to many smaller companies) know very well the specific training and skills-set that go into creating a professional copywriter. A professional copywriter knows how to tailor the skills mentioned above to meet the unique requirements of each firm.

And above all, a professional copywriter is able to be a consultant to these firms, performing first the tasks of a consultant and consumer behaviour specialist, and then a creator of persuasive content. In fact, in many of the world's most established copywriting firms, senior copywriters don't

even work on the final copy. They conceptualise the content based on their insights and data, and then leave the task of content formulation to a junior copywriter.

Copywriting is an old, established profession. It's also exciting since it's classified as a creative function, which is why the lure of copywriting can be so strong. Also, copywriting works within the context of language and since all of us use language as a necessary function of life, the appeal of copywriting is further intensified.

And this is where most aspiring copywriters stumble. Indeed copywriting is reliant on language but to think that one has the necessary skills to be a copywriter because they know a language is like someone saying he or she is familiar with first aid and therefore qualifies as a neurosurgeon.

A company that's just produced a 150-page annual report is not going to hire a person to proofread the document just because that person is a teacher who marks students' essays. Similarly, you aren't likely to hire a retired police officer to promote your case in court just because the officer knows the basic aspects of the law, or was once referred to as an officer of the law.

Likewise, a copywriter is not someone who is only familiar with the language or has an ability to write. A copywriter is a trained professional (a communications specialist) with experience in consumer behaviour and client psyche, and who's spent a lot of time analysing and reporting on industry trends.

Copywriters are skilled in text analytics and semantics. They are highly educated in and thoroughly exposed to culture and politics (small P). And arguably the most important skill that earns someone the title of a copywriter is the ability to predict and fulfil consumer purchase criteria.

This last, and most important quality is a data-driven skill. A copywriter knows extremely well how to put findings into practice. A copywriter must know how define a competitive set of customer perceptions because only then can the copywriter tailor an offering to consumption circumstances.

Why Copywriters Fail: Misconceptions, Mistakes, and Misery

It must seem obvious that professional copywriters, like professional accountants, have the requisite knowledge, experience, and training to perform the functions of copywriting. So why are there still so many retired teachers,

aspiring novelists, and self-proclaimed language experts still masquerading as copywriters? Why do more than 90% of all freelancers go bust within the first year of operations as copywriters, when the demand for copywriting is only increasing in the age of information?

And why do others who manage to stay afloat find it difficult to nail down five figure monthly salaries (often charging in the cents per sentence) in an industry that's so highly prized?

There are two reasons for this. One is the absence of a certifying body for copywriting. Unlike professional accountants, there is no examining board for copywriters who want to achieve professional status. Therefore anyone who wishes to call themselves a copywriter may do so without scrutiny.

But take note: Although this path may seem convenient for budding copywriters, the absence of a governing body means that your skills are tested directly by the market itself. And the market, unlike a governing body, is hasty in deciding, harsh in its rejection, and permanently unforgiving to those who mess up just once. In other words, where a certified professional does not judge you, the clients, whom you need for your business, become the ultimate and only judge and jury.

And once word spreads, it stays for a long, long time. Of course this does not happen to every aspiring copywriter. But the rules of any industry are essentially identical when it comes to expertise. Many a freelance copywriter who takes this fact lightly, or chooses to ignore it, falls quickly into a disreputable category.

This is why more than 90% of all freelance copywriters fold up their business in the first year. And this phenomenon leads to another unfair side effect. With the number of freelance copywriters terminating their operations prematurely, the freelance industry comes under fire where companies no longer want to work with a freelance copywriter, even if they have the abilities, out of fear that the freelancer will simply go bust.

The advice, and the signs, are simple: Know your field very well. Know what you're getting into by choosing to become a copywriter. Remember, it's a professional field (despite not having a unified governing body) in which evaluation of performance and price is assessed directly by the clients who decide how good or not you are. Professional copywriters (the real ones) do this evaluation for themselves, setting

prices that are commensurate with their expertise and on par with the global copywriting industry – which as we've seen is a highly prized field.

The second reason why copywriters fail is because of the term itself: copywriting. We tend to look at the 'writing' part of copywriting and believe that this is the core skill necessary.

It's not entirely the fault of new copywriters. The U.S. Bureau of Labor makes the same error, grouping copywriters together with writers, novelists, and authors. While there is some overlap, it is insignificant. What we should be looking at is the word 'copy', not 'writing'.

Why Copywriters Succeed: Majors, Masters, and Mash

'Copy' means text, and text is a rather large definition that encompasses words, images, people, organisations, communities, countries, and planets. Textual analysis is therefore the study of the world around us and how it interacts and fits with the people whom you want to message.

Owing to the sheer scale of diversity, textual analysis is not a perfect science, but neither is it a pure art with total creative freedom. This is why we call copywriting a craft. Copywriting balances the science of textual analysis and consumer behaviour with the art of humanising communication to accumulate and harness stronger network effects.

Professional copywriters are not afraid to mash these elements together and sift through the outcome for meaning, even if the result is a formidable combination of content. That's because each combination from the mash yields something of a symbol that is as unique as the entity for whom the content is for.

Copy relies heavily on semiotics (see Ferdinand de Saussure) which is the study of signs and symbols (includes words) and their implied meanings to the individual and the society. Here's a simple example: A traffic light has three colours – red, amber, and green.

Regardless of whether we speak English or Mandarin or any other language, we as a global society agree that red means stop and green means go. This meaning is implied by the colour of the lights and agreed upon by the world (denotation) so that the colours of a traffic light are

universally understood. However, the colour red has different associations for different cultures.

For some cultures it's a symbol of prosperity and energy, and in others it signifies blood, war, anger, and hatred. These different meanings are called connotations and are unique to the different cultures who perceive the colour red within context of their own experiences. And then there's the history of the traffic light; the modern version with the three colours was created at General Electric and is now used all over the world.

A copywriter is able to consolidate all these aspects (in this case the denotations, connotations, and history) and apply a cultural lens to the text so that the final product resonates on a conscious and unconscious level with the target audience.

This is the premise, the bedrock, on which copy is built. And this is also why a great novelist or author is not automatically a great copywriter, and vice versa. Copywriting is an independent function which carries its own set of criteria, and is measured by its own metrics for utility and usability. In other words, a novelists write for pleasure. Copywriters write for purpose, and that purpose is to sell.

What Every Copywriter Must Know: Traditional and Digital Mediums

When you choose to enrol in a copywriting course, there are probably several factors influencing your decision. One that doesn't often take centre stage but is critical to a successful copywriting career is the medium in which you want to specialise. We've seen that there's a lot more to copywriting than general perceptions of the industry.

Copywriting itself has multiple layers in which one can choose to specialise. The two primary subsets of copywriting are traditional copywriting and digital copywriting. The traditional medium of copywriting deals with offline content.

Collaterals that are associated with traditional copywriting include brochures, pamphlets, newsletters, annual reports, posters and billboards, and market flyers. In our age of information, each of these collaterals has a digital counterpart.

The same collaterals are distributed across the world in electronic format to be read on desktop screens and mobile devices. In fact, you can add the letter 'e' to almost all of

these pieces and chances are your colleagues will know what you are referring to.

So one of the questions we get asked most often in our copywriting course is 'what's the difference between traditional and digital copywriting?' Surely with a click or two one can convert a newsletter destined for print, into a format suitable for digital distribution. This is true so why the distinction? Because of the way people utilise and consume text on screens is significantly different from paper.

Various studies have agreed that attention spans are shorter and traditional reading orders are disrupted when viewers interact with texts on screens. These disruptions have led to some of the most delightful and innovative designs for websites and e-newsletters.

Copywriters who've worked for long enough in the traditional medium are aware of the subtleties of content absorption owing to variances in design. To take an internal example, applicants to Quantico, with knowledge of typography and information design systems have an 80% higher chance of getting accepted than those without design knowledge.

This is because the kind of typeface used for the words will determine the level and quality of interaction with the content. Imagine writing a letter to two of your local government representatives and receiving a reply from one set in Arial, and the other in Comic Sans.

For those who followed the election of Barack Obama, many will know of the campaign's focus on one-word and short slogans (Change, Hope, Yes We Can).

Professional copywriters will be able to tell you that it wasn't just the words that made a difference, but the typeface used — Gotham. A bold, simple, highly geometric type that had a distinct 'for the people' appeal was used to reflect the qualities of the campaign, and by extension the president himself.

Typography is everywhere around us, from the train station route chart to the advertisements on the side of the platform, to the websites we use, the brands we follow, and the books we read.

There can be no words in the digital space without typography. If words are the body of the content, typography is the soul of it. Typography is just one of several subtleties

that professional copywriters are fully aware of and utilise to strengthen their products. Copywriters also need to know how the digital medium interacts with content. Most digital content ends up on websites. And a website is useless unless the target audience can find it.

Getting on Google's Good Side: Writing For Two-ish Audiences

Thus we enter the complex world of search — a rich, expanding pageantry of content that parades across our screens. When we write for traditional mediums, we write only for people. When we write for digital mediums, we write for two audiences — people and spiders. Okay so they're not real spiders but rather small snippets of software code that index the entire content of the world wide web. (Get the reference to spiders now? Spiders? Web?) Search engines develop and use their own spiders to crawl the web and spin web links across all content.

And while the algorithms of these spiders are only getting scarily intelligent at mimicking human reading behaviour (see Google's Artificial Intelligence Project) we are still, for the time being, writing for two distinct sets of audiences. Humans beings will understand language nuances better than the spiders because we are a semantic species. The spiders need more help in understanding meaning but are becoming extremely good at it.

(This is why you can search for the term 'car' in Google and also get results for 'truck' 'bus' and 'motorcycle'. This is semantics.) We write to make the content clear to both humans and spiders, which is not always a straight forward affair. Humans may understand the nuances, references, and double entendres but spiders may have difficulty keeping up. As a result, the spiders will rank that page lower. That is unless there is significant human traffic to that page, in which case the spiders will rank it higher. Professional copywriters are, surprise surprise, semantic experts.

(Note: if you are not an expert in semantics you are not a professional copywriter. Period.) They know how to balance semantic equations within content to create texts that engage both humans and spiders without trading off quality, interest, or index levels.

Whether you choose to specialise in traditional copywriting or digital copywriting, there's no getting away from the pervasiveness of technology that influences every aspect of the copy process. And yes, to be a great professional

copywriter is to be familiar with the world of tech. It's the future that's happening now.

What's Next For Copywriting and Copywriters?

The Future Of The Industry

In the age of information, copywriting has been steadily gaining traction as an integral part of the content revolution. (Naturally we mean the copywriters who know about the stuff we've talked about). The industry is growing fast, which means soon there'll be just premium space left for premium copywriters to occupy. If you're going to become a copywriter, do it with full knowledge of and respect for the industry which you will be working in.

Quantico's copywriting course was developed from our own experiences over a decade. It's a great industry to be in and we're pretty much in the centre of the content revolution. While programmers will create the next generation of web and software applications for the world, copywriters will connect the world with those products and services, and communicate their utility. We will be responsible for the next wave of digital content and linguistics.

We will also become the curators of meaningful content. It is our job, and passion, to lead the world towards clarity and engagement through semantics, culture, network effects, consumer predictions, and data-driven decisions that affect the minds of readers on a conscious and unconscious level.

42 Deceptively Easy Tips

Here are 42 more tips (simple but not as commonly practiced as you might believe) to get a stronger grip on copywriting practicalities.

1. You are writing for human beings. Prioritise engagement from the outset itself. If it does not interest, it does not work. Period.
2. Begin with the end in mind. What' is the expected result? Write towards an ultimate action you want customers to take.
3. Words have emotions. Identify which ones apply to your copywriting and work for your customers. Emotional appeal is key.
4. Myopia serves nothing. Always look ahead by at least 20% more than your clients. It's part of a copywriter's job.
5. Always remember that you are selling something, not only products or services, but ideas, concepts and aspirations.
6. Information seldom comes in neat packages. It's your job to pull in the bits and pieces and present the big picture to your client.
7. Don't expect to get it right the first time. No one expects that. Focus instead on getting it right in the most efficient ways possible.
8. Keep your client in the loop. Clients may not be expert copywriters but they are the experts in the field you are writing about.
9. The first draft is always the worst. The first ideas come to everyone. Dig deeper for greater originality and appeal.
10. Assert your expertise. Listen to suggestions but exercise your own expert judgement. You are responsible for the final result.
11. Credibility is currency. Error is fraud. Ensure that every writing piece is without grammatical or factual errors. Even the drafts.
12. Want to be a great editor? Try reading your sentences from right to left (English script). It's easier to spot errors that way.

13. Copywriting is an element of design. Form follows function in every type of communication, including written content.
14. Insist only on the highest quality work, even if the client is satisfied with what currently exists. If you can do it better, do it better.
15. Never steal another's work. Plagiarism is the scourge of the industry. It's easy to discover and impossible to explain away.
16. The best approach to adopt is the reader-centric one. It requires empathy and results in total understanding of customers' mind.
17. Research. Research. Research. Then research some more. Then some more. Research. Have some time? Research.
18. Know when to stop tweaking. Perfection is the result of the work doing what it's supposed to. All other forms are non-existent.
19. Copywriting is a lot like Mathematics. There is a perfect system. There is an elegant solution. And logic always take priority.
20. Know the language. Know its every nuance. Your language is your source of all copywriting expertise. It's your fountainhead.
21. A copywriter is an artist and a scientist. Copywriters are adept at making information speak to the right and left brain.
22. Try beginning with a mind map first, then do an outline. Chaos is the cradle of creativity. There will be plenty of time to organise.
23. No one cares how great you are. Everyone cares how you can make their lives great. Talk about your customers, not yourself.
24. Knowing a language does not make a copywriter, just as knowing a song's lyrics does not make a musician.
25. Your words will be judged by those who are not in the business of words. It's up to you to clarify expectations before starting.

26. There's no set time to write, just as there's no set time to enjoy the day. Whatever works for you is fine, just meet the deadline.
27. Don't begin with a description, unless it's essential. Instead evoke a thoughts-train. Ask a short question or state an assumption.
28. Copywriting is the domain of those who can truthfully convince customers of their expertise. Be that copywriter.
29. When did it become cool to treat customers as fools? Be good to readers. Every copywriter is obliged to create ethical content.
30. The first eleven words of any paragraph sets the tone for the rest of the piece. Pay attention to the first eleven words.
31. Vary your sentence lengths for greater interest. Long sentences slow down time. Short sentences speed up time.
32. Tone of voice is critical. We use tone of voice to sense feelings and receive emotional feedback.
33. You are only as good as your last tagline, paragraph or advertorial. Smart copywriters never believe they've achieved perfection.
34. Use jargon carefully. A specialised audience will expect and appreciate it, but to the uninitiated, it will be nonsense.
35. Use gender-neutral language. Your copywriting is going out to the human race. Be inclusive.
36. Watch the labelling. Some audiences do not like being referred to as 'victims'. Neutral labels hide negative connotations.
37. Get the punctuation correct, and know the correct names. Virgules, octothorpes, pilcrows, and interpuncts are proper terms.
38. Hyphens, dashes, and minus signs are often incorrectly interchanged. Use them properly. Misuse is tantamount to misspelling.
39. Watch the redundancies. 'In my personal opinion' is redundant. Redundancy is the enemy of accuracy.

40. Watch the vocabulary. 'Revert to you' means 'I will turn back into you.' Clients may not know this. Copywriters must know this.

41. American or British spelling? Either one is acceptable as long as there is no interchange. That is a copy crime.

42. Clients trust you with their content. Convert their words into actions that create positive outcomes for their business.

Style Guide

Copywriting is an attention-acquiring activity. Once you've got the attention of your audiences, what do you do? You sell your point. That's the purpose of copywriting — to sell a product, service, argument, object, person, and idea.

Achieving this objective requires practice. This style guide is not a quick fix to circumvent practice. Copywriting, like a muscle, needs constant exercise to strengthen. This style guide is a treadmill for your brain. Work on these exercises and your copywriting will get stronger.

Exercise 1: (10 points)

Observe a person next to you and make an assessment of what he or she needs that you can offer. It can be anything, from a handkerchief in your pocket to a few encouraging words or a pat on the back. Promote your offer in 30 words. Exactly 30 words.

Exercise 2: (15 points)

You've got your 30 words down. Rework your offer into a selling point by breaking it into 3 sentences. Also take it down to exactly 15 words.

Exercise 3: (20 points)

Re-write your 15-word sell in exactly 15 words. Use synonyms if necessary but keep it to exactly 15 words.

Exercise 4: (25 points)

Write a 30-word paragraph (exactly 30 words) about a place. It can be any place — a park, your house, your office, a museum, anything you like.

Exercise 5: (30 points)

Still keeping to the precise 30-word limit, re-write your paragraph to discuss the activities one can carry out at that place. Focus on actions (verbs are action words) that people can do.

Exercise 6: (100 points)

Do the 5 exercises (above) within a time limit of 10 minutes.

Insight: Brand Loyalty

The process of creating brand identity from copywriting is an old one. It's been around for as long as language has existed. But its evolutionary pace has been staggering, especially over the last fifty years which have seen the explosive growth of schools of thought, identified strategies for success, and well over half-a-billion documented examples and case studies of branding's impact on organisations and individuals across societies and cultures around the world.

For a field as old as medicine, law, and music, the language of branding is still primarily a mental projection of ideas and concepts. To add to the complexity of brand identity, every projection is open to interpretation. In a nutshell, branding is big, complex, often misunderstood, always under scrutiny, and plays a vital part in every kind of business imaginable. That's because branding creates differentiation, and differentiation is key to survival and growth.

A brand's identity used to be differentiated on the basis of features – what the product could do. This gave way to differentiation based on benefits – how the product could make life easier for you – thus paving the way for branding to target people. Then came differentiation based on emotion – how the product could make you feel.

Differentiation based on emotion is powerful. It invoked feelings within consumers and created deep-root bonds for the very first time. Simply put, people felt good when they bought a brand that communicated emotions. Today we've gone considerably further. Brands differentiate on the basis of identity – who you are.

The Clan Brand introduces or reinforces an identity for like-minded consumers who collectively create and establish a clan that shares values and ideas with the brand. Consider Apple™ – the most powerful brand today. Apple customers are a diverse group of people from virtually every type of background.

And every single one is united by a common Apple value thread. Whether it's Apple's incredibly sleek designs, progressive outlook towards software and hardware development, reliability and robustness, commitment to cleaner environments, or simply a way of dressing and

accessorising – these values permeate Apple’s brandscape and unite every single human being that buys an Apple product. Apple and other mega-brands have enjoyed such success largely due to a simple realisation that affects brand identity today.

Brand identity is no longer created by organisations. The evolution of branding vis-a-vis the exponential growth of social media, technology, and information sharing, has led to the control of brand creation and growth being taken away from organisations, and given directly to consumers.

Today it’s consumers who make, define, grow and destroy a brand’s identity. Consumers create the boundaries in which brands are allowed to grow and operate.

They call the shots together through mass consensus – a relatively easy feat in our hyper-connected world. The majority makes the rules. Word-of-mouth is law. Judgement is based purely on the wisdom of the crowds. The so-called masses pass the verdict on a brand’s performance. They, the consumers, are in power. So what happened?

To put it succinctly, organisations began to create choice. Consumers welcomed it and bought into it. The buying led to more choices. Consumers were even more empowered. They started calling the shots. Brands that refused customer demands were replaced with others that ceded.

A precedent was set. Customers were always right even when wrong. Many, many brands accepted the precedent and the age of brand-mediocrity was born.

But some brands resisted the urge to sellout. Instead, they chose to bolster their brand’s value by showing why they were different. These brands went for collaboration.

When a group of protesters gathered outside the White House, President Kennedy was asked how he would like the matter to be handled. The President invited the protesters inside and sat them down for a discussion that led to satisfactory outcome for both. Instead of deciding on how to handle, the President actually handled it.

And in the process he became permanently identified as America’s most popular and beloved of presidents. Great brands do the same thing. They step up and they take the

handle. They involve people in their brand identity. Great brands know that the wisdom of the crowd will always be greater than the capability of the few intellectual elites. These brands grow their brand identity out on the playing field, with real people and real issues, not in boardrooms with only a select group from marketing and public relations.

Involving your customers in your brand identity construction phases is critical because you are drawing from a massive collection of ideas and insights – something no agency, marketing department, or CEO will ever have in full.

Best of all, this collaboration of brand identity construction is free. Brands with solid identities like Coca Cola, Apple, Facebook, Google, and IBM have built their brand identity together with their customers. Neither did they cede fully to the crowd, nor did they disperse them. These brands collaborated and in the process seeded their brand identity in many more minds.

A brand boundary is simple notion of what a brand is associated with. Colgate, for example will mostly be associated with Toothpaste. Nokia with phones. Google with search engines, and Ferrari with sports cars. Now imagine a Colgate mobile phone, a Nokia toothpaste, a Google soft drink, and a Ferrari family MPV.

To most people, these will seem like anomalies and this in itself is dangerous for brand identity. To customers of the brand the results are far worse. The dilution of brand identity happens when set boundaries are crossed by the brand. Customers who buy a brand repeatedly come to expect certain associations. In their minds they draw boundaries for the brand's identity.

These boundaries are fluid at first when contact is still new, but tend towards permanence as interaction continues. After some time, the brand begins to resonate with the customer, recognition takes firm root, and expectations are clarified. This is brand equity – or the value of the brand as perceived by the customer. What happens when the brand oversteps the line?

First, brand identity begins to dissolve. This is because the overstepped boundary sets off a reaction in customers' minds – the brand is not easily recognised since its identity is being spread over a larger brandscape. Common associations are weakened and the brand boundary becomes blurred.

Suddenly, that feeling of being special and unique is eroded. The guiding light is no longer a laser, focused and pure. It's now a ray that is easily disregarded in the dazzle of other lights and sparkles vying for attention. The essence of the brand identity is lost.

What's even more deadly to the brand identity is the insidious nature of this phenomenon. In the short-term, revenue may actually increase due to customer curiosity. In the long-run however, customers want to belong to a brand, not be pigeon-holed into a product category. Without the initial brand identity to provide the guiding light, customers will go looking for another brand identity that does.

Brand identity is everything. It's more than logos, typography, symbols, icons, and colours. It's an association, a connection, a gut instinct, that creates immediate recognition and centres customers in a world of fleeting products, razzle dazzle services, and noisy marketplaces.

The Clan Brand is the most powerful brand because its identity is shared with its customers. The brand identity has also been built together with its customers. Want to become a powerful clan brand? Collaborate with your customers to build your brand identity. It's easier than you think.

It's important. Designing one's brand identity is up there together with financial operations, employee turnover, trademarks, customer retention, and global expansion into emerging markets.

A solid brand identity will communicate the organisation's position clearly to its target customers. A weak brand identity will result, at the very least, in poor communication. Worst case scenarios include customer dissatisfaction, fall in patronage, and even the permanent closure of the organisation. Sounds serious, perhaps over-dramatised even? The best way to put this into perspective is to examine the world one minute at a time.

In 60 seconds:

- 168 million emails sent
- 695,000 Facebook status updates
- 70 new domains registered
- 700,000 searches on Google
- 98,000 tweets
- 170,000 Skype calls connected
- 13,000 iPhone apps downloaded
- 600 New videos on YouTube uploaded

There is a staggering amount of information that great writing and copywriting create and share every minute. Most of this information is generated by users – customers who purchase products and services, utilise them, and share their experiences with other consumers across the globe. Most of this information can be traced back to a brand.

Be it an automobile, software, airline, money, gadget, destination, movie, policy, country, or celebrity. Look at any topic under discussion and a brand name is close at hand. Singapore is a brand, the same way that Apple, Facebook, Twitter, and Ewan McGregor are brands. Consumers are talking about brands. If a product is great, the brand usually does well. If the service is poor, the brand usually suffers.

The quality of products and services are often slow to react to consumer feedback. Several annoyed customers returning faulty phones to a manufacturer will not see an immediate change in the product's quality. Consumers realise all too well that goods and services require time, in usually significant amounts, to change.

This realisation affords goods and services some insulation from the merciless onslaught of consumer criticism. Brands are a different story. A faulty product requiring fixing is allowed some time.

The brand, however, comes under immediate fire. Given the unnerving speed at which information travels, such fire can spread rapidly enough to permanently burn the brand before the manufacturer even has time to send an email to quality

control. Brands can burn fast and when they do the inferno usually takes down the entire brand identity superstructure. If it's a weak superstructure, the destruction can be even faster.

Why then do brands have such a volatile composition? Because brands are created in the minds of customers. Products are made in factories. Services are created in training rooms. Brands, however, are not the product of boardroom meetings or client-agency projects.

Brands are what people think about when they experience a product or service. These thoughts and associations include any number of attributes — fun, credible, easy to use, flimsy, yucky, plain and mesmerising to name but a few.

When a significant number of people (enough to be called a crowd or tribe) share similar associations a brand is created. Basically a brand is owned by customers simply because they create it. What's more, no client nor brand agency, or anybody for that matter, has any control of what people think.

So what good is a brand agency then? An experienced brand agency not only realises the truth of brand creation, but embraces the opportunity such truth brings. Consumers call the shots when it comes to branding. Consumer minds are brand factories with total restrictions on access.

Consumers are also human beings with reactions, emotions, and a sense for experiences. Great brand agencies know they cannot control what a consumer thinks but can influence how these thoughts are born through simple brand identity strategy and brand identity design.

So how does brand identity strategy work? Fancy term — brand identity strategy. The meaning is simpler. A brand identity is made up of elements, basic building blocks that go into creating the brand's superstructure. These elements include colour, typeface, shape, form, size, function, language, material, and people.

Some elements are more important than others. All elements must work in harmony. Brand identity strategy is the process of determining which elements will work best in combination with each other to truly communicate the promise, features, benefits, and values of the product or service to consumers.

Brand identity design begins with identification of elements and assigning them communicative importance. This process follows the same rules, whether it is brand identity design for Singapore, Spain, Mauritius or the Cook Islands.

And what about brand identity design?

Brand identity design is arranging the elements across media to communicate the brand's message. This can be in the form of a logo on a letterhead, a symbol in an airport, an avatar on a web site, tagline on a billboard, or a unique product shape. Whatever the case, a brand identity designer is responsible for taking the relevant elements of brand identity and arranging them in a way that communicates meaning to consumers.

This meaning must be as close as possible to the values of what the organisation stands for. For example, if a software corporation values innovation, the brand identity designer must communicate innovation across the brand's identity elements. Innovation must be deduced from the logo, tag line, colours, typeface, shape, and customer communication.

What control does a brand identity designer have over the people aspect? A brand identity designer is a graphic designer with a few differences. A graphic designer deals with visual communication.

It is a graphic designer's responsibility to create visuals that communicate meaning. Such meaning must be interpreted in the same way that the graphic designer intends, by the maximum number of people that experience the visual.

Brand identity designers are graphic designers.

In addition, brand identity designers are also brand trainers. The job scope includes everything that a graphic designer does, with the extra responsibility of training a brand's most precious asset — its people.

The people comprising an organisation are the organisation's biggest brand element. This is the case in any society and every culture, from the boardrooms in Hong Kong and Singapore, to the aboriginal tribes in Central Australia, to the past civilisations of Rome, Egypt, and Greece where branding first took root.

An employee can communicate in much greater depth about the organisation's brand, and with much more credibility than the largest sign on the side of the tallest building. Employees need to believe in the brand's values they are representing. Mis-alignment of personal and organisational

brand values remains the single largest factor for employees to stay or leave. So many organisations spend an incredible amount of resources on establishing perfect brand elements, without looking at the most important element of all, its people. In fact, the people element in brand identity design has more power than every other brand element put together.

It is a brand identity designer's job to ensure that every aspect of the brand identity design process is created and established to perfection. And this includes people.

More than training is educating employees on why an organisation has adopted the values it seeks to convey via its brand. Employees who understand this reasoning have a much stronger desire, and motivation to operate within the organisation.

Brand identity design's biggest challenge, when it comes to the people element, is to educate and include employees on the brand identity design process.

The target is to create a culture in which an employee grows with the brand, and wants to see the brand grow. Brand identity design that creates great people alongside great colour, shape, form, logo, web design, function, typefaces, and material is brand identity design that is truly working.

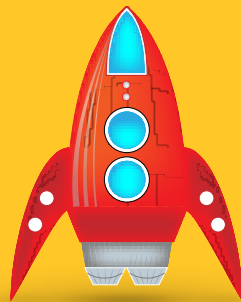
Great brand identity design is the cumulative result of great graphic design, great web design, and great people coming together to believe in what the brand stands for.

The elements that go into brand-building are important. The best brand identities are a solid combination of relevant elements with people always in the centre of the brand identity design matrix.

Consistency Planning Guide

Six Simple Questions To Help You Plan For Consistency

1. Are your tenses the same? (if you're writing in the past tense, everything should be in the past tense)
2. Is the person in your head, for whom you are writing, the same person at the end of your copy as he or she was at the beginning?
3. Is your copy using 'We' or 'The Company' or 'Name of The Company' at every point?
4. Your organisation probably has brand guidelines. They are called guidelines for a reason. Your main point may take precedence and require a word or term that is not in the brand guidelines. Find out if you can use this word or term. If your brand guidelines are truly guidelines, you will be able to add to it.
5. Are your headers and tagline calling for action or for description? Whatever your headlines are calling for, all the others should call for the same.
6. This is critical to reading enjoyment: Are all your sentences shorter than 65 characters in length? If not, move to the next line but do not let the eye run on horizontally. One of the prime causes of failed copy is tired eyes. Keep all your sentences to a maximum of 65 characters.



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