BAKED WITH LOVE:

60 Days to Better Marketing Copy

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START HERE: Your Ideal Customer

Assignment: Create a Persona for your Target Market and Ideal Customer

Just as a novelist will write 3 to 5 pages of back story on each main character before she begins writing, you should write the back story for your ideal client.

Write out every detail about them that you know (from your research) or can guess at reasonably well. Demographics are good, yes. But don't forget the psychographics: what keeps them up at night? What is their main motivation for getting up in the morning? What do they in their spare time? What clubs or organizations do they belong to? Be as complete as you can.

Here's an article I wrote a few years ago, that sheds a bit more light on the topic:

The Persona: How to Keep Your Dinner Guest in Mind

You care about your Aunt Sally.

So, you don't knowingly serve her shellfish when she's allergic.

By the same token, any marketing message you try to deliver should also be created around specific knowledge of your prospect.

Here's what I mean: Who is the person you are trying to reach? Does she have a name? Of course she does. So start there.

Take out a sheet of paper and write down everything you know about her. (There's a worksheet at the end of this to help guide you.)

Yes, the requisite demographics will get you started. But dig *really* deep and add things like hobbies and other interests. What gets her out of bed in the morning? What makes her tick? What problems does she need to deal with? Where does she hang out? What radio/television/websites does she listen to/watch/peruse?

Now keep this fabulous piece of paper close by as you craft your message… ***to her***. (This is what I like to call the Perfect Client profile. Other marketing folks refer to this as a marketing persona.)

When you have a specific person in your head as you write, your story nearly tells itself.

WORKSHEET: Your Perfect Client Persona

Write a full page about your ideal client. You can model this after an actual ideal client you've already worked with or know well. Use the items below to start. Add or subtract qualities as appropriate for your situation.

Give this person a name:	
Age:	
Family Size:	
Geographic Location:	
Income:	
Hobbies:	
Clubs/Organization(s):	
Religious affiliation:	
Political affiliation:	
Publications/Books reads:	

Music Listens to:	
TV watches:	
Time online/URLs visits:	
Main motivation in life:	

Number 1 Burning Desire or Problem (as it relates to YOUR product or service):

The Starter Recipe

Many German bakers (the great original sourdough masters) make new bread starters from scratch every six months or so to keep them fresh.

You may not be a German baker, and you've probably already created your website and other marketing materials, but it wouldn't hurt you to take a look at this starter recipe to get a fresh approach to your marketing messages.

Now if you're working with your great-grandmother's starter or one that has traveled the Oregon Trail, (and if it's making great bread for you), don't throw it out! But if you feel

like your marketing is just not hitting the mark, go through these steps and before you know it, you'll have yourself a solid outline you can use online or in person.

Here's the thing: Before you write one word of the copy in your marketing, you must first:

- Know your objective
- Know your target audience
- Know your product or service

Your objective: What are you trying to accomplish with your website? or with any of your marketing pieces for that matter? Direct sales? Lead generation? What response are you trying to get? Your objective might not be to make a sale, but rather to get your reader to send for free information or to sign up for your mailing list. But yes, sometimes your objective is to go right for the sale!

Your target audience: The more you know about your target audience, the easier it will be to convince them that they need your product or service. The more specific your knowledge of them is, the better. Let's say you're selling a night out on the town. Your target audience could be many things – but in this case you choose to target couples. And you might fine-tune that to target people whose jobs are stressful and who really need some R and R.

I could write an entire course just on how to research and choose a particular target market. If you haven't figured this out yet, drop me a line and let's see if we can work on it together.

Your product or service: After identifying your audience, it's essential to know your product or service. Just because this is YOUR product or service, doesn't mean you can succinctly talk about its features and benefits. Believe me, I've seen lots of folks struggle with this one.

Take some time and immerse yourself in these topics. The five Ws of journalism are a handy tool to use for this: What? Why? Where? When? Who? And the bonus How?

Assignment #1: Answer these questions

Take out a sheet (or 2) of paper for each item you sell and answer the following questions:

- What is the product or service I'm selling?
- What is it made of? How is it delivered? (these are its features)
- Why was it developed? (what problems does it solve? These are the *benefits*)
- Where did it originate?
- When was it discovered?
- Who invented or discovered it?
- How is it made?

Uncover everything you can. Especially the emotional benefits of owning or using it.

(Additional reading on the next page…)

Features vs. Benefits: How to Get Your Marketing to Produce Results

The $64,000 question is: *Do your customers want to buy what you're selling?*

If you've done your marketing homework (i.e., market research), and you know *without a doubt* that your product or service is something people need and/or want, yet you still fail to generate sales, then there's something missing in your marketing messages. You may be talking about features and not benefits.

In short, you're not "speaking" your customer's language (either online or in person).

So how do you do that? How do you get on the same page and make that important connection?

You stop talking about your product or service's *features* (usually the things you think are brilliant) *and start explaining the benefits* (what's in it for your customer).

Here's what I mean: if you're unlucky enough to still have a hard copy of the yellow pages around, go get it. (It's okay, I'll wait.)

Now open it up to any page and take a look at the display ads. Notice the words they use to describe their various offerings. Turn some pages and keep reading. Notice anything?

If you said that most of the ads used very similar words and text — bingo! You'd be right.

Here's are some typical examples you might find on just about any ad:

- Satisfaction Guaranteed
- Open 7 days
- Se habla español
- Free estimates (consultations, etc.)
- No appointment necessary

You'll also see various bullet lists of features that are specific to that type of business. Take a peak at the beauty salons and you'll see a list of things like: Haircuts, Highlights, Perms, Waxing, Nails…Ad infinitum.

The problem here is two fold:

1. These businesses aren't differentiating themselves from the other businesses in their niche (they are using the same marketing messages as everyone else); and

2. They're using a list of features instead of benefits.

Your customer really wants to know this one thing: **How do *you* solve my problem?** They may not consciously know that that's what they want to know. But it is. Trust me.

You need to paint a picture for them of the benefit(s) they'll get if they buy from *you*!

When you explain the benefits to a prospective customer, they are much more likely to make the connection in their brain that they need/want what you have to sell.

AND, if you take it a step further and explain the ***emotional*** benefit they'll receive and couple it with a call to action (something like, *how would you like to pay for this? Credit card or check?*), you'll have a sale for sure.

Here's a very simple example of what I mean:

Let's say you're selling pencils. And one of the features of these pencils is that their shape is hexagonal. Cool right? (Yes, but that's just a feature.)

The *benefit* they get from this feature is that the pencil won't roll off the desk. It stays put. That's the cool part, right? (Almost, but not quite.)

The *emotional benefit* is what's truly important. Why? Because all sales decisions are ultimately based on our emotions. Even when we try to be objective and logical, we only buy when we *feel* that it's right.

In this case, it could be that having a pencil that stays put saves you time and energy (eliminates the need to bend down and pick it up, or eliminates the time wasted in trying to find where it went); thus, keeping your work day running smoothly. In other words, *it keeps you feeling calm and collected*.

The emotional benefit is something that should be extremely important to our target customer: the stressed out accountant. The guy who's already working 60 hours a week and doesn't have time for little annoyances like pencils rolling away to nowhere.

And when you use that little scenario to paint the picture for the customer, they will “see” it and “hear” it and it will all make perfect sense to them. And then they will say, “Yes!”, and pull out their wallet.

Try this with your own product or service: take out a sheet of paper and draw two lines down the center so that you have 3 columns to work with.

1. In column 1, list every possible feature of your product/service.

2. Next to it in column 2, ask yourself the question “So what?” and write down the answer.

3. In Column 3, ask yourself again, “So What? (or “what positive emotion does this create in my customer?”) and write down your answer.

Keep repeating until you’ve exhausted every possibility.

Now check the emotional benefits against your market research and see where they line up with what your target customer wants and/or needs. ***These are the stories you need to be telling***. This is the language you need to be using to connect with your prospects.

Need some help figuring out the true benefits of your product or service? Let’s chat! If you’re a new client, I’m happy to spare you 20 FREE minutes of my time. If you’re an existing client, please purchase a block of time that you feel would be appropriate.

Here’s the link to my calendar: https://storybistro.acuityscheduling.com/schedule.php

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Only after you identify your objective, familiarize yourself with your target audience, and know your product or service thoroughly, is it time to start the real digging.

Assignment #2: Using the Recipe - Question 1

The challenge of crafting every marketing message you'll ever need has been distilled here into five easy steps that make the task of writing copy as easy as pie – and tasty, too!

Each step in the recipe takes the form of a question. Once you answer each of the five questions about your product or service, you'll have the basic ingredients, a mini-version of your marketing copy.

NOTE: As you are answering these questions, don't get creative. Just answer factually. We'll get creative later. Promise!

Question 1: What is the Problem?

Most sales, both online and offline, are based primarily on solving a problem. Having identified your target audience, your job now is to *identify the problem that your target audience has that can be solved by your product or service*. In marketing and copywriting terms these are known as the three Ps – pain, problem or predicament.

This is where you play doctor. You diagnose the problem. The people in your target audience may not even know they have a problem, so it is your job to make them recognize it. Many marketers shove the solution down their viewers' throats before their audience recognizes that there is a problem. That's like a doctor prescribing medicine before you feel sick or understand that the shot will prevent the flu.

There's another aspect to it as well. Once your audience understands they have a problem, *you have to let them know that you understand their problem*. There's an old saying that goes something like this: "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care."

Ingredient 1. Write down the problem(s) your customer is dealing with. Just one or two sentences. But be sure to capture the pain portion of how this impacts them and their life...

Assignment #3: Complete Your Starter Recipe

Question 2 of the Starter Recipe: Why hasn't the Problem been Solved? (Or, the burning desire, fulfilled?)

Extending the doctor metaphor, this is where you further identify the history of the problem, predicament, or pain that your target market has experienced up to now. What previous remedies or solutions have been attempted but failed? As you progress through all five steps of this recipe, you'll begin to see how the answer(s) to this question serves to build your audience's anticipation about a new solution you're about to reveal.

Assignment: Complete Your Starter Recipe

Ingredient 2. Write down the reason(s) why the problem continues, persists or lingers. How is it that they haven't solved their problem, and why are they still stuck in the rut? Again, a few factual sentences will do.

Question 3: What is possible?

In coaching parlance, this is called possibility thinking. This is where you set the stage for what life could be like – what could happen – when your audience's problem, pain, or predicament is eliminated. You must go beyond stating the obvious. "The pain in your lower back will disappear," is not enough. You must draw a picture of what is possible now that the pain is gone. "You will be able to engage in activities (specify activities) you were unable to engage in because of your back pain," or "You can accomplish all your goals and dreams because the pain is no longer there to stop you." This is the dramatic promise.

Ingredient 3. Write down what's possible. Paint a picture of the way things will be when your prospect's problems are solved. Again, a few sentences will do.

Question 4: Why are YOU uniquely suited to help here?

This is where you explain who you are and how your product or service can help them, as well as what's different about your product or service that will eliminate their problem. This is where your unique selling proposition (USP) comes in. A USP is something that sets you, your product or service, or your business apart from every other competitor in a favorable way. It's the competitive advantage that you proclaim to your prospects, customers, or clients.

Ingredient 4. Write a few sentences about what differentiates your product or service. Present just the substance – not the details.

Question 5: What should your prospect do now?

If you answered the first four questions, and established your objective, you know what the answer to this question is. You simply tell your audience to do what you started out wanting them to do – that is, to sign up, pick up the phone, register, opt-in, or buy what you're selling.

Ingredient 5. State clearly what you want your prospect to do. This is the call to action.

There you have it. Once you have answered the five starter questions, you have the recipe for building any marketing message. You now have the structure; all you have to do next is embellish it. The fact is, with this recipe alone, you can make some sales.

How to Use Your Answers IRL (in real life)

Imagine for a moment that you are at a Chamber mixer with a business acquaintance named Roberta, a personal development coach. Roberta is an expert at successfully generating leads for her service, and this is how she does it:

PROSPECT: What kind of work do you do?

ROBERTA: I'm a personal development coach.

PROSPECT: Hmmmm. What exactly is that?

ROBERTA: Let me ask you a question. Are there three things you'd like to accomplish in your life right now that for some reason or other you haven't been able to accomplish yet?

PROSPECT: Sure. I think I can think of more than three.

ROBERTA: Why do you think you haven't been able to accomplish them?

PROSPECT: (answers vary from person to person. They range from "I haven't focused enough attention on accomplishing them" to "I have an unsupportive boss/spouse/family" to "I can't seem to find the time or energy to devote to them" to "I'm stuck in a rut and I'm still trying to figure my way out," and so on).

ROBERTA: What if you were able to eliminate (here, she reiterates their specific challenge), how would your life change?

PROSPECT: (again – answers vary.)

ROBERTA: What if I told you I have a unique approach to help you take care of (that specific challenge), which will help you get from where you are to where you want to be – not in a few years, but within the next 60 to 90 days? Would you be interested in a 15-minute free consultation to find out how I can do that for you?

PROSPECT: Sure – why not?

At this point, she takes her business card out and asks what day and time would suit the prospect for a free consult. When the prospect answers, she writes the appointment on the card and hands the card to the prospect, telling the prospect to call her at the

appointed date and time. She then turns the card over and points to a diagram on the back.

ROBERTA: Before you call me, I'd like you to do something fun. I'd like you to do this quick exercise here and tell me what your answer is when you call me. Then I'll explain what what your answer means.

PROSPECT: Okay, you got it. I'll call you then.

Do you see what she did? She managed to get a prospect interested in her services in a matter of one or two minutes, and she generated a lead that might eventually turn into a client, which of course, was her objective.

Let's examine the conversation more closely to see how it relates to our recipe. When prospects ask Roberta about her work, she uses it as an opportunity to identify their problems (*Ingredient 1*). Instead of making an educated guess about what their problem(s) might be, she makes the prospects identify their own challenges by asking them to think of the top three things they have yet to accomplish. Then she asks why they haven't been able to accomplish them yet (*Ingredient 2*).

Roberta next asks the what-if question; that is, she makes prospects imagine how life would be different if the problem(s) were eliminated (*Ingredient 3*).

After her prospects answer the question, Roberta mentions her unique approach to helping them take care of the problem(s) so they can get from where they are in life to where they want to be in the next 60 to 90 days (*Ingredient 4*). This is followed up with an offer of a free 15-minute phone consultation at an appointed date and time (*Ingredient 5*). The fun exercise on the back of the card is a device she employs to make sure prospects call her and to minimize no-shows.

Roberta's networking sales pitch is one small example of just how powerful the recipe is. Especially when your prospect identifies their own predicament for you, and creates their own perfect scenario of how life is different once that problem is solved.

Assignment: Outline your own networking strategy using the above as a model. Go back to the 5 Starter Recipe Questions you've already answered.

When you model success, you need to model the strategy, not the result (meaning you don't mimic someone else's writing style, you simply use the technique). The recipe is one of the most important strategies you can learn. If you follow it, it's almost impossible

to be stumped for what to say, or to experience writer’s block. You won’t struggle to be creative or clever or amusing or profound. You just use the facts.

In our next lesson, we'll start to make those facts come alive for other marketing purposes.

Embellishing on Your Starter Recipe Answers

To Review...the last 3 lessons had you finding your own particular Marketing ingredients:

1. My customer's # 1 problem/desire
2. Why can't they solve/attain it
3. Picture of the world when I solve it
4. What's different when it's solved
5. Call to action

In order to use these ingredients as the basis for any marketing materials you have, you'll want to expand on them by adding appropriate stories, metaphors, emotional pulls and other flourishes as appropriate.

Assignment: Start to brainstorm possible embellishments

Take out a blank piece of paper and write down ideas for how you will illustrate your points.

For example, choose one or two compelling client stories that fit the outline of your ingredients. These will be case studies.

Other great sources are testimonials and survey results -- any qualitative or quantitative data you've collected over the years.

If you don't have any "hard" evidence that you've collected yourself, look at secondary sources. Are there any industry surveys that were done recently? You really only need two to three of these pieces to begin.

Are you struggling with this part? If you'd like to chat, I do offer a FREE 20 minute laser coaching session for folks who aren't already my clients. If that sounds like it might be helpful to you, shoot me an email.

Write Your Customer a “Love Letter”

Trust me on this one -- you *need* to do this! Not only will it help you practice talking directly to your prospects in a heartfelt way, it's a great first draft for any sales pages you may need in the future.

Assignment: Write a letter to the Persona you just created

Keeping in mind the details of the persona you created and your 5 starter ingredients, write a letter to your ideal client explaining who you are and what you have to offer. Write it as you would write any letter to a friend. Pretend you know them extremely well (you do!) and let them know you know how they feel. Add the empathy, the sympathy, *the emotions* that surround this topic.

Share these assignments with a trusted colleague or friend, get their feedback and edit again. Next: read each the letter out loud. Does it flow? Does it sound natural? Edit again.

Your Site's Architecture

You've already seen how to use the starter ingredients in a live, networking situation (Review Lesson 3). Now let's look at how to serve up these messages in other ways.

The whole reason you signed up for this course was so that you could rock your website or blog, so let's start there.

Assignment: On a blank sheet of paper outline the architecture for your website.

You'll have a home page of course. But what other pages do you need and why? What will be the objective of each of those pages (what will be your call to action)?

Now look at your starter recipe, and letter to your ideal client and map each of those to a page, or pages. Your starter recipe will most certainly begin on your home page and continue through to an About page, or a Hire Me page. Take your draft and see what the most logical format is and apply as appropriate.

You can repeat this process for any marketing collateral: brochures, ads, even tweets!

The challenge with applying this to smaller "real estate" items (like a tweet), is that you need to focus heavily on the WHY and the call to action. For example, let's say you just wrote and blog post and you'd like to share it with your followers. You DON'T want to just say, "Here's my lastest post: http://bit.ly/xpwt." That doesn't say anything at all to your target audience.

If you've written your blog post for your ideal client using the starter recipe, then your post will contain elements of your message that you can use to connect with your audience in a tweet. And your tweet should say something like, "How to Solve X in 3 Easy Steps: http://bit.ly/xpwt."

Now there's a reason for your ideal client to click through and read your post. AND if they like it and find it relevant, they may share it with their networks as well.

Here's a quick test: What was the call to action in that tweet?

That's right: it was an implied call to action of "click here" -- implied by the URL that was included.

Assignment: Outline the other bits and pieces you want to add to your marketing pantry.

Keep in mind who your ideal client is, where they hang out, and how you can get in front of them. Do they read the newspaper? Then you'll need to get an article about you published in the paper, right? If they are more the internet-type, where do they surf? Are there any online forums or bigger blogs they visit on a regular basis? If so, you need to be there, too.

If you feel like you could use some help with this particular lesson, let's talk. All you need to do is shoot me an email and let me know what challenges you're having. I'll get back to you right away and we'll take it from there!

Your Home Page

We've tackled the foundational bits of your website (your Contact, About and Products/Services pages), now it's time to work on the design.

Why do we tackle design *after* we've addressed the architecture and the foundational copy? Because it takes this much time to get your arms (and brain) around exactly what you want your website to do with (and for) your visitors.

Plus, design is what allows you to deliver your content the way you *really* want to.

By now, I assume you've already looked at the designs of nearly a hundred websites (including those of your competitors); all the while taking notes about what you like and what you don't like.

You've already got your branding nailed down (your logo and design colors). And perhaps you've picked out a design theme as well. (Are you using WordPress? If not, be sure that your site's content management system (CMS) is easy enough to navigate on your own.)

The design tweaks we're going to address next are all managed by your CMS. Let's begin with your Home page.

Depending on the design theme (template) you've chosen, your Home page will have several layout options that you'll need to choose from. One of the first questions you need to answer is: Will you lead with content (like blog posts) or do you need to provide a more static welcome to your visitors?

Your answer to this question depends on your business model, but my recommendation is that your site *should* utilize a blog no matter what. (You can keep the posts off the home page, if you need to, but it plays an important role in so many aspects of your online marketing).

The other piece you need to figure out here is the message that you'll use to welcome your visitors. You'll want to help them identify themselves as your ideal customers as soon as possible and lead them through the pages of your website in a way that helps them find the content they came for.

Assignment: Go back to your notes on Question 1 of the website starter recipe (What is your ideal customer's biggest problem?).

Use your answer to that question as the starting point for your welcome page copy. Remember -- the copy needs to be more about your visitor than it is about you. (You have an a lot of other pages to talk about who you are and what you offer.)

Write out a short draft of about 150 - 200 words. Read it out loud. Edit as necessary. Make sure you've included the top 3 keywords you'd like to be found for online. Edit it again. Keep in mind that this is both a welcome message AND a tool for ensuring your bounce rates aren't too high. (More on bounce rates in a later lesson).

If you feel like you could use some help with this particular lesson, let's talk. All you need to do is shoot me an email and let me know what challenges you're having. I'll get back to you right away and we'll take it from there!

Where do your visitors go next?

It's happened just the way you imagined.

A potential customer has searched for an answer to her question and found YOU.

She's clicked the link in the search results that lead directly to your website. (In this particular example, let's pretend the link takes her to your home page.)

Will she be able to find what she's looking for? Or will she be distracted by all the bells and whistles you've added?

That all depends on whether or not you make the path easy to find.

Assignment: Revisit your website starter notes from Question 5 (What action do you want them to take now?). Use your answer to brainstorm three or four different paths that your visitors might take to get to that point. Map out the pages that they'll visit.

Next, draft out a short page of directions you could offer to a new visitor. This is your If You're New Here page. It will contain links to your most popular content as well as at least one or two Calls to Action (see your answer to Q5/What action do you want them to take now?).

If you feel like you could use some help with this particular lesson, let's talk. All you need to do is shoot me an email and let me know what challenges you're having. I'll get back to you right away and we'll take it from there!

Your About Page

Your website or blog needs an About page. Surprised? You shouldn't be.

If you want to do business online (and make money at it), you're going to have to give people the opportunity to know, like and trust you.

And most folks are accustomed now to finding out about you and your business through the About page.

Where to start: Dig up your answer to Question 4 of the Website Starter Recipe. Look specifically at the parts where you talk about *how you're different.*

(If you didn't do the assignment, it's time to do it now.)

Assignment: Use your answer to Question 4 as a base to build your About Page on.

Then, think about how you would answer these questions:

- What's your background? Why are you qualified (or not) to do the thing you're doing?
- Why are you passionate about what you're doing?
- What do you when you're *not* doing the thing you're doing? (This gives people a larger vision of who you are as a human being)
- What's your backstory? What particular path(s) did you take to get to this point?

You get the idea.

A couple of questions I often get:

Q: Should I write this in 1st person? Or 3rd person?

A: If your business is just you, write it in 1st person. It makes absolutely no sense to try to be something you're not. Be authentic. Don't try to sound larger than you are. When you hire your first virtual assistant, you have my permission to switch to 3rd person, if you absolutely must.

Q: How long should my About page be?

A: As long as it needs to be. If you can get away with 500 words, do it. But if your story needs a larger space, take it. You can break up the copy with sub-headings and bullets -- or even sub-pages -- if necessary.

Some final tips:

Keep in mind who your ideal client is as you write this. Are you using any industry-specific terms (i.e. jargon) that might be unfamiliar? Not everyone will know what that acronym means.

Use plain English at about the 8th grade reading level. Keep your sentences short. And write as if you are speaking directly to one person (yep, your ideal client).

Your Contact Page

Your Contact page shouldn't be overlooked as a place to add a little pizzaz and personality.

After all, if you want to actually SELL something, you want people to contact you, right?

Lots of folks who do business online feel like they can hide behind the anonymity of a website and often fail to include a phone number where they can be reached.

Do you still use your Yellow Pages? Guess what, neither do I. One of the top reasons people search for you online is to find your phone number. So include it often and always.

If you don't want people to call you, what are you afraid of?

If it's being bombarded with calls, remember: there's this new invention called voice mail. It's fabulous for when you can't (or don't want to) get to the phone. Okay, no excuses, right?

But don't just stop at your email addy and your phone number. Think about all the many ways your ideal client might want to reach out and connect.

Assignment: Put yourself in your ideal customer's shoes, and brainstorm as many ways as possible that they might prefer to communicate.

Make the list and don't forget things like:

- A snail mail address. If you work from home and don't want people to have your address, then get a P.O. Box. Simple. (Hint: the USPS -- as long as they stay in business -- is often the best deal in town.)
- Your social media links
- Your skype ID
- Your Google voice widget
- Still using a fax? Some people are.
- A map to your location (again, only if you have a brick-and-mortar shop)

- A schedule of any regular meetings you attend
- Links to any pages for specific products or services, or even an FAQ page
- Also - are there any special directions you should include (for example: where to park, how often you're available by phone, etc.)

You get the idea.

A couple of questions I often get:

Q: Should I include my actual email address on the contact page? I thought that would open me up to getting SPAMmed.

A: If your theme doesn't come with a contact form, use a plugin to create one. I use Gravity Forms but also like the Contact Me plugin for WordPress. And yes, include your email too. Just format it like this: tea {at} storybistro {dot} com; or, create an image that people can read. (That's how we foil those dang SPAM bots.)

Q: Where should my Contact page link from?

A: The main navigation (at the top right of your site) is where most people will look for it. But also include a smaller link at the bottom of your site, too.

Some final tips:

Keep in mind who your ideal client is as you put this together. Are they tech savvy? Then make sure you give them lots of techy options. If they prefer the human touch, be sure you've included those.

Use a photo of yourself or a fun graphic that expresses your personality. This helps make the human connection more real. For inspiration, check out these designs.

If you feel like you could use some help with this particular lesson, let's talk. All you need to do is shoot me an email and let me know what challenges you're having. I'll get back to you right away and we'll take it from there!

Your Products/Services Page, Part 1

What is that you're selling? Most of us are offering either a product or a service; sometimes both.

But how are you describing them?

Guess what? It's time to nail down the benefits of doing business with you.

Here's what you need to do...

Assignment: On a piece of paper, draw two lines down the center, so that your paper is divided into thirds.

On the left, make a list of all the features of your thing.

Here's an example of features for a hypothetical widget:

- Color options (Choose from your choice of 5 spectacular colors!)
- Shipping options (We ship anywhere in the world!)
- Hand-made by a special tribe in Asia (No, not a sweat shop!)
- Fits into most any brand of widget-whatchmacallits

You get the idea. Now do yours.

In the center, answer the question, "So that...?" after each feature. Here's what I mean:

- ...You get the color you want/need/desire/that fits your decor
- ...No matter where you live, you can have one of these/you don't have to get in your car to buy one

- ...You get a totally high-quality item/your item is one-of-a-kind
- ...You don't need to worry about model numbers

And now on the right, answer the same question again until you drill down to an emotional benefit or motivating factor. Here's an example of what I'm talking about:

- ...You feel complete/you feel unique
- ...You won't be left out/you can feel smart that you found the solution
- ...You feel confident that you got the best/you feel unique
- ...You can relax and spend time worrying about something else

Let's look at this exercise again for a hypothetical service this time.

Features:

- Available 7 days a week
- We speak Spanish
- Easy payment plans available
- We guarantee our work

So that:

- ...You can work with us when it's convenient for you
- ...You can work with someone who speaks your language
- ...You can afford our services
- ...You don't need to worry about whether or not you'll get you what you need

So that:

- ...You don't have to worry about fitting us into your schedule
- ...You can feel confident that you're being understood completely
- ...You don't have to worry about paying your other bills, too.
- ...You can feel confident that you're getting exactly what you want

These are really simplistic examples, but I think you get what we're after here: the BENEFITS of doing business with you.

And even more importantly, the EMOTIONAL BENEFITS of doing business with you.

If you feel like you could use some help with this particular lesson, let's talk. All you need to do is shoot me an email and let me know what challenges you're having. I'll get back to you right away and we'll take it from there!

Your Products/Services Page, Part 2

Once you know what the benefits are from doing business with you AND you know what your ideal customer is truly worried about (remember: what's their biggest challenge or burning desire?), you are truly equipped to outline your Products/Services page.

Depending on how many items you're offering for sale, you may have multiple pages. But let's start with an outline.

Assignment: Make two lists of all your products and/or services:

1. First, list them from lowest price to highest price.

2. Second, list them in categories -- so that if you have multiple options in one category, they are all there.

What we're after here is a big picture inventory of what you're selling...because we want to see how to best present these options on your website.

If you're selling products and need to create a catalog (because you've got so many items), then you'll be able to see at a glance how small or large that catalog needs to be. And how you'll organize it.

If you're selling services, this will help you identify any holes in your offering. Do you need to spend some time working on your product/service development?

Now think about how you'll present these offerings on your website. You'll need at least one or two introductory sentences at the top of your page to let people know they've arrived in the right place and to tell them where they're going.

Next, bring back your list of benefits (from Lesson 8) and incorporate *at least* the top 3 benefits into your copy for each item.

Demonstrate your authority

Before we move forward, let's recap what we've done so far.

You began with the Website Starter Recipe and answered 5 important questions:

1) What is my ideal customer's biggest problem or burning desire?

2) Why hasn't she been able to solve it (up till now)?

3) What's possible for her if it is solved?

4) How are you uniquely positioned to help her solve it? and

5) What's the next step she needs to take to get closer to solving it with you?

You then wrote some basic web pages that worked as the foundation for telling your story.

You've also outlined the path on your website that your ideal customer will most likely take to get to your answer to #5 above.

Now comes the part where you provide lots of proof -- both primary and secondary -- that YOU are the one she's been looking for.

The content that you author and add to your website is primary proof that will help her see you as an authority -- and as the one with the answer to her biggest problem.

So how do you figure out what that content should be?

You brainstorm. You ask questions. And sometimes -- yes! -- you even ask your ideal customer directly.

What we're looking for here are the types of questions that your ideal customer is asking about what you have to offer.

If you are a house sitter, for example, she may want to know things like:

- How do I find the right house sitter?
- What should I expect to pay a house sitter?
- What can I ask a house sitter to do for me?

Get it? You want to get inside her head and think of all the different questions she's asking about your particular thing.

And then you want to provide her with answers via any of these options:

1. Articles - published on your site or elsewhere
2. Blog posts
3. Videos
4. Podcasts
5. Audio files
6. Infographics

So here's your homework: take an hour or so and start brainstorming all the questions your ideal customer needs to have answered before she can buy from you.

This is a list you'll want to keep handy so you can add to it as things bubble up to the surface.

Next, take some of the most important ones and start outlining a plan and schedule for how you'll address these questions. The simplest thing to do is write articles or blog posts. So let's start there. I'll have more for you in the next installment.

If you feel like you could use some help with this particular lesson, let's talk. All you need to do is shoot me an email and let me know what challenges you're having. I'll get back to you right away and we'll take it from there!

How to Write Your BEST Blog Posts

Last time, we talked about the primary proof you'll need to demonstrate your authority.

These next few lessons will focus specifically on how to do that very thing.

First, we'll tackle the Blog Post.

Most of us have written a thing or two by the time we're old enough to start our own business. So I'm not going to give you remedial writing lessons.

In fact, I'd really like it if you'd forget most of what you learned in school!

I don't want you to worry about dangling participles or sentence fragments. And I want you to forget about being perfect.

What I *do* want from you is your voice. Your *real, live speaking voice*.

Yes, you're going to write this next blog post just the way you speak.

How do you do that?

First - you write your article. Then, you put it away for at least an hour or more.

When you come back to it, read it outloud. And as you read, edit the punctuation and content to match the inflections in your voice.

When you speak, you usually use contractions. Incorporate those into your copy.

Notice where you stop to take a breath? Put a period there. (Shorter is always better any way.)

What word do you emphasize? Bold that. Or *italicize* it. Or -- if it's really crucial to making your point -- use all CAPS.

After you've done those edits, the next step is to let it sit again. Preferably overnight.

This time, when you come back to it, I want you to look for places you can add an aside comment (something in a set of parentheses) or another way to get across what you mean.

Think about it this way: when you're having a conversation with someone, how does the banter usually go? Do you make short explanations on the side? Do you ~~change your words~~ strive to be politically correct? Do you tell jokes? If it's appropriate for your piece (and it usually is), add a tidbit of humor where it makes sense. You can do that with the ~~strikethrough~~ formatting, the parentheses, or even changing the size of your text.

The idea here is that most folks don't read much anymore. We talk. We watch TV. We may even listen to talk radio. Our brains have been trained away from formal writing.

Formal writing is (yaaaawn) boring! And if you do it, you'll lose your readers faster than a microwave dinner.

So write that blog post or article tonight. And spend the next day or two injecting your voice. Use your words, yes. But also think about how you can do some of that visually with your text formatting.

Formatting that Blog Post

Now for a little more formatting.

We're going to make that blog post or article *scannable*.

Remember when I said people don't read?

They really don't.

Unless they decide it's worth their time.

And how do they do that? They scan.

First, they read the headline. Is it interesting? (Let's say for the sake of argument here, yours has caught their attention.)

Next they'll take a look at the body and see what's there.

Sub-Heads come in Handy (<-That's a Sub-Head)

Make sure your piece has at least two, preferably three sub-heads. (It will really depend on the length, but for the average blog post of about 1200 words, this is pretty accurate.)

Next, wherever possible, break up those paragraphs into smaller bits.

One sentence per paragraph is *totally cool.*

If you see yourself writing something with a lot of commas, you might be in list mode. In that case, use some bullets or a numbering system to break things up visually.

Your Reader Needs White Space

Remember when I said folks don't read? One of the things that keeps them from reading is a lack of white space. It might be an unconscious decision, but we all do it.

When you see an article or a blog post, if it's very text heavy, your brain says, "Um...I don't *think* so." And you skip right on by.

So don't let that happen to your lovely bit of work.

Open it up and let it breathe.

As a reminder:

- You've injected your voice through textual formatting (e.g. italics, strikethroughs, etc.)
- You've added some white space via short sentences and paragraphs
- You've called out important shifts in the writing with sub-headings

Now we're going to go back and look at the content.

What's Your Point?

When my son was in high school, he signed up for an advanced English class and quickly found that his writing wasn't quite up to snuff. His papers were regularly bringing in Cs, where before his grades never went below a B minus.

The problem? He was trying to write flowery and emotionally based essays. They were so beautiful, they might've been considered poems. (He fancied himself a songwriter back then.)

But his papers ended up wandering everywhere and leaving the reader wondering what he really meant by it all.

Being the good mom (with an English degree), I reminded him of the basic format for any writing:

1. Thesis statement
2. Evidence
3. Conclusion and restatement of the thesis

Since he couldn't quite wrap his brain around that, I used this analogy:

You know how when you have something you want me to do for you (like, give you $100 so you can buy a new pair of shoes), you come up with a convincing argument to make your point? You've always got a long list of good reasons WHY I should give you that $100? That's exactly what you need to do in your writing.

When writing a blog post, the idea is the same:

- Have a clear purpose or topic -- its simplicity will depend on the length of your piece. You should be able to state it clearly in *one sentence*.
- Have at least three examples to explain or elucidate your topic (this is your evidence).
- Wrap up with a conclusion that restates your topic.

Bonus Content!

If you follow the above outline, you'll meet your readers' minimum expectations. Good. But not spectacular by any means.

To make your blog posts really rock, you'll need to add these as well:

- Instructions - Don't just tell your reader what they need to change and why. Give them some simple starter instructions for next steps.
- Inspiration - Are you inspiring your reader to take action? Are you touching their emotions somehow? (We'll address this one more fully next time.)

Take a look at your content from this perspective and see if it measures up. If not, go back and revise or edit out anything that muddies your original intent. Then make sure you fill in any holes.

Inspire Your Reader to Take Action

You may write some fabulous stuff. But if your reader never takes action -- never attempts to put your advice into practice -- then you're not going to get very far as an *authority*.

You *need* your readers to take your advice if you ever want to have testimonials about how you've helped them (and you definitely want some great testimonials!).

Inspiring them to action is a gift you give that gives back to you.

Persuade With Reasons And Repetition

Studies have shown that people are more likely to comply with your directions, if you just give them a reason to! Think about it...people do things for a reason, give them good reasons to do what you want them to do.

Repetition is critical in persuasive writing. Argue your point from many different angles, always arriving at the same conclusion...your's! You should: state your position plainly and clearly, use examples, use statistics, tell a story, quote a famous person or authority, give convincing evidence that your position is the right position to take.

Provide Social Proof

When you show that others agree with your perspective, you go a long way toward proving your point. People look for guidance from others as to what to do or what to accept. Just look at how many testimonials you see on sales pages. Social proof in a blog post means quoting other authorities, statistics or research.

Before you publish that blog post, do a quick internet search to see what others have said about the same topic. If you find something valuable, use it (and quote/link to your source!)

Use Comparisons As A Persuasive Technique

Using metaphors, similes, and analogies are very common persuasive writing techniques. Why? Because they allow you to compare your conclusion to something the reader may already accept as true, which makes your point easier to understand. (I did this last time when I used the example of my son's struggle with writing an English essay.)

Feel Their Pain!

Identify the problem your solution will be solving a little later in your piece (remember what we covered in Lesson 1?). Let them know you know how they feel. You've been there and done that yourself, and here is what you found to take the pain away! Your solution's credibility goes way up if you can demonstrate to your reader that you truly can identify with their problem.

Use a Story to Illustrate your Point

This is probably the most crucial thing you can do. And there are two ways to do it:

- Using a direct story
- Using a comparative story

Let me explain:

In a direct inspirational story, the people and the actions are meant as a direct example. The story of a paraplegic overcoming odds to live a normal life is not a direct inspiration to a real estate salesperson, but the story of the guy who cross-sells the customer is.

The direct inspirational story *comes from the same industry you're in*, and was originally experienced by someone who does what you do. It's directly applicable as an example. It's a role model. It's also harder to work with because it's likely there are fewer good examples to use, and you can't just keep trotting out the same old ones every time.

In a comparative inspirational story, you're comparing one person's situation to another. You're sending the message: if this person can overcome obstacles to succeed, you can, too.

Comparative inspirational stories come to us all the time from the world of sports and are applied to business because in both cases people are striving against competition to win. Same thing with war analogies. On a different side altogether, a story about getting through a difficult family situation and maintaining relationships can also inspire a team having troubles getting along (it’s not always about sports and fighting). In my situation, I like to use the metaphor of cooking as a way to explain writing.

Why You?

You may be wondering, who am I to write something inspirational? Why would anyone listen to me?

You’re the person with the blog other people are reading and learning from, that’s who. You’re already inspiring them. To what degree is up to you.

That's it for today. Next time, we'll tackle your blog post's title (aka the headline).

Mouth-Watering Headlines

Get Them to Read What's Next

The whole point of writing any sentence is...to get your reader to read the next one!

Yep. It's that simple. (Not necessarily easy, but simple, yes.)

Your headline or title is the first thing anyone ever reads. So make sure it does its job!

A couple of things to consider:

- Write your final title or headline last. You may start with just a headline when you first begin, but come back to it and polish it before you publish.
- Write for humans first, search engines second. Yes, keywords are important for SEO. But most blog posts and content gets shared by humans, not Google.
- Make sure your content lives up to the headline. Your title is a "promise" of sorts. You're promising to tell your reader something. Make sure you do, or they won't be back for more.

Okay, with those three points out of the way, here are some specific tips on crafting headlines and titles:

Use Curiosity

Start with a bit of mystery. Start with Why. As in...*Why New Moms Need a Nanny to Stay Sane*. Or, *Why Your Bank is Charging You More than it Should*. It's just basic human nature. We're curious. Use that to your advantage. (And yes, you could also start with What, Who, When or How for the same reasons.)

State the Big Promise (or Benefit from reading)

Your number one selling point should be up front. It helps your perfect customer self-select themselves and prepares them to respond. Plus, if they read nothing else, they have at least seen the best selling point you have to offer. If you have trouble

writing this kind of headline, it’s a sure sign you need to think a bit more about your product or service. Here are a few examples:

- Start your own business and quit your job in 90 days
- Create your own website in 24 hours or less
- Double your leads from in-person networking

Announce Some Exciting News

We read newspapers and magazines because we love news. We not only want to know, we need to know. Writing your headline in a way that suggests news, rather than advertising, can have the same powerful appeal of a feature story in the morning paper. An important note: the product or service doesn’t necessarily have to be newly created to qualify as news. It merely has to be news to your reader. Just make sure you avoid hyperbole. (Remember, your content must deliver on the promise in the headline.)

Ask a Question

When our brains hear (or read) a question, they can't help but try to answer it. If the question is applicable to our lives (and we don't already know the answer), it's a sure-fire way to get us to read further. You could use something like *Do You Make These Mistakes While Networking?* or *Do You Need to Learn Chinese for Your Next Job?*

Use Numbers

One of the most popular structures for a blog or article title is the Numbered List. As in, *101 Ways to Bring Romance Back to Your Marriage.* These kinds of headlines are popular because they're *specific*. They let your reader know what to expect.

Also, the larger the number, the more you may impress or intrigue someone -- enticing them to read and discover your vast knowledge and authority.

The More You Write (Headlines), the Better You'll Get

The practice of writing great titles applies to more than just your blog posts. You can (and should) keep these tips in mind for all your writing. Great headlines (that make people go clickety-click!) can be found in your email subject lines, your tweets, and even your Facebook posts.

There's a great tool out there that was created by Jon Morrow of Copyblogger. It's called Headline Hacks, and you can download it for free here. (I get nothing out of sending you there. I just really like the tool.)

So write your headline. And yes, *now* you can publish that blog post.

Share and Share Alike

Make it Easy for Your Ideas to Spread

Today's lesson is not just about your copy. It's about how to get that copy shared and out to the world.

One of the biggest mistakes people make with their web content, is not making it easily shareable.

You've gone to the trouble to write some epic stuff -- why hide it under a rock?

What do I mean?

Now that social media has become so pervasive (and, by extension, sharing buttons), when people visit your site, they expect to be able to share, like or tweet anything and everything. And when they don't see those buttons? Yikes! What to do?

If you're using WordPress, adding social sharing options is easy...you just choose a plugin that works best for you and turn it on.

If you're not using WordPress, then hopefully the platform you are using has some simple ways to incorporate sharing buttons. FIND OUT!

Ideally, you want an option that will allow you *at a minimum* to place those buttons immediately below the last line of text in your blog post, page, article or other bit of content.

If you're a WordPress user, I recommend either the Digg Digg plugin or the Sexybookmarks plugin (by Shareaholic). But there are literally hundreds of others to choose from. (I'm currently using Elegant Themes' new social sharing plugin, Monarch.)

Your assignment: Get those buttons up there TODAY.

Once you've got those locked and loaded and ready to go, make sure you're the first one to use them after you publish that new blog post. You've got to start the ball rolling by sharing...

- On your Facebook wall and fan pages

- Via Twitter
- In a LinkedIn status update
- On Google+
- ...and whatever other social media channels your ideal customers use

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A Final Word

Writing great copy and content takes time and practice. Consider this course just an intro.

The best way to become a better writer, is to read -- a LOT -- every day. And to write something every day.

If you can find a group of smart folks who're willing to read your writing and give you honest, constructive feedback -- even better!

If you'd like some help building on what you've learned here, I urge you to check out my private and group options:

GROUPS

Story Lab: http://storybistro.com/story-lab/

Biz Blogging Mastermind: http://storybistro.com/blog-mastermind-group/

PRIVATE

Story Coaching: http://storybistro.com/project/story-coaching/

And of course, if you have any questions, you can always find me via email: tea@storybistro.com.