

**What's inside:** An **introduction to online copywriting** reveals that content is king, and gives you the **key terms and concepts** needed for this chapter. **How it works** discusses **personas** and the importance of **layout** and some **HTML basics**. Writing online, you will need to look at **short copy**, which includes the all important **Call to Action**, features and benefits, and writing **PPC adverts**. **Long copy** still requires attention to the elements that make sure you are **read**, and we look at the all important **SEO copywriting**. The web is full of **neologisms and buzz words**, but you'll keep on top of them with our **tools of the trade**.

## 5.1 introduction

Online copy is a hardworking multi-tasker. It must provide information to visitors, engage with them, convince them to take a desired action and all the while, convey brand ethos. It also has to provide context and relevance to search engines. All this it needs to achieve, without appearing to be trying too hard.

You will see in this chapter that writing for the web is different to writing for more traditional media. Secondly, when it comes to the Internet, content is king! Many people argue that it is one of the most significant determinants of the success of your online campaigns. Considering it is one of the most direct lines of communication with your consumers, this is not surprising.

Online copywriting involves everything from the copy of a website, to the content of an email and all things in between. From WebPR articles of 800 words to three line PPC adverts, if it's being read on a screen, it's online copy.

Writing for the web does not mean the traditional rules of writing need to be abandoned. By and large, the foundations remain.

In this chapter, we're going to look at the basic principles you need to know when writing for the web. We cover knowing your audience and understanding HTML. We introduce the concept of keywords and writing for search engine optimisation (SEO), look at the types of web copy that you can use and finally, we outline the best practices for successful online copywriting.

## 5.2 key terms and concepts

term	definition
<b>Above the fold</b>	The content that appears on a screen without a user having to scroll.
<b>Active verb</b>	A word that conveys action or behaviour, and in a Call to Action, tells a reader what to do.
<b>Benefit</b>	The positive outcome for a user that a feature provides.
<b>Call to Action (CTA)</b>	Words used to encourage a prospect to take a particular action.
<b>Dynamic keyword insertion</b>	In paid search advertising, this allows keywords used in searches to be inserted automatically into advert copy.
<b>Feature</b>	A prominent aspect of a product which is beneficial to users.

<b>Mass customisation</b>	Tailoring content for many individuals.
<b>Persona</b>	A character used to define a group of users to a website.
<b>Pay Per Click (PPC)</b>	Pay Per Click usually refers to advertising on search engines.
<b>Sender alias</b>	The name that is chosen to appear in the sender or from field of an email.
<b>Search engine optimisation (SEO)</b>	Aims to improve rankings in search engines.
<b>Search engine results page (SERP)</b>	What you see when you perform a search on a search engine.
<b>Unique selling point (USP)</b>	This is what makes your offering different to your competitors'.

## 5.3 how it works

### 5.3.1 Know Your Audience

One of the assumptions one can usually make about writing is that it is done for an audience. In marketing and advertising, knowing your audience is vital.

It will guide you in your content strategy, determining the topics they want, and help you organise information in such a way that makes sense to them. It will direct the tone of your copy. Ultimately, understanding who you are writing for will ensure you are more able to communicate your message to them and thus increase the likelihood that your copy will achieve the desired result.

Step one of writing for the web is to ensure you have researched your audience and understand what they want. Once you have a clear idea about this, you can figure out how to fulfil those needs using your copy.

Holly Buchanan of "Future Now" summarises this with three questions you should ask:

1. Who is my audience?
2. What actions do I want them to take?
3. What information do they need in order to feel confident taking action?

**tip**

Sometimes it helps to write for just one person. Pick out someone you know who fits your audience, or make someone up, and write for that person. In copywriting, this person who fits your audience is a persona.

When you are researching your audience, there are two useful concepts to bear in mind: the audience of one and personas.

## 5.3.2 The Audience of One

According to Price and Price, audiences were traditionally thought of as a vast and vaguely defined crowd (2002). Because the web provides a voice to individuals and niche groups, the concept of this mass audience is disintegrating.

Price and Price go on to argue that the Internet has led to an audience of one (2002). What does this mean? While your audience is not literally one person (and if it is, thank your mum for reading your website, but spend some time on growing your readership), it is not a vast, vaguely defined crowd. Instead, online we have many niche audiences who are used to being addressed as individuals.

When you are writing marketing material, you need to identify that individual, investigate what they want and write as if you were speaking directly to them. The individual that you have in mind when you are writing could also be called a persona.

## 5.3.3 Personas

A persona is a profile that a writer creates to embody the characteristics of the target audience for whom she is writing.

Personas are based on the profile of readers of your copy. Creating a profile is all about considering the characteristics of your readers and their needs and desires. When you are building this profile, there are a number of things that you should consider about your audience:

- Are they primarily male, female or a mixture?
- What are their other demographics?

Once you understand these simple characteristics, you can ask yourself a few, more in-depth questions. If you are selling something, questions include:

- How do they make purchasing decisions?
- Do they compare many service providers before selecting one?
- Do they make lists of questions and call in for assistance with decision making or do they make purchase decisions spontaneously based on a special offer?

Understanding the reader profiles of your readers is an important process, and the best copy usually results from extensive time spent figuring out your audience.

Tailoring your copy to your audience does not necessarily limit you to one persona. Digital copy can be structured in such a way that it caters for several personas. However, you need to spend time understanding their needs before you are able to write copy that addresses these needs.

## 5.4 HTML

HTML stands for HyperText Markup Language, and it's the foundation of documents on the web. HTML tags tell browsers how to present content. HTML tags are in the brackets that look like arrows: < >

A good digital copywriter will also be able to use basic HTML to layout copy, knowing that it is the appearance of the page that will get his words read. It should be easy for users to skip and skim the copy, and it should be easy for them to find the parts that are most relevant to them.

When writing online copy, you can use an HTML editor, where you insert the tags yourself, or a What You See Is What You Get (WYSIWYG) editor which works in a similar way to a word processor.

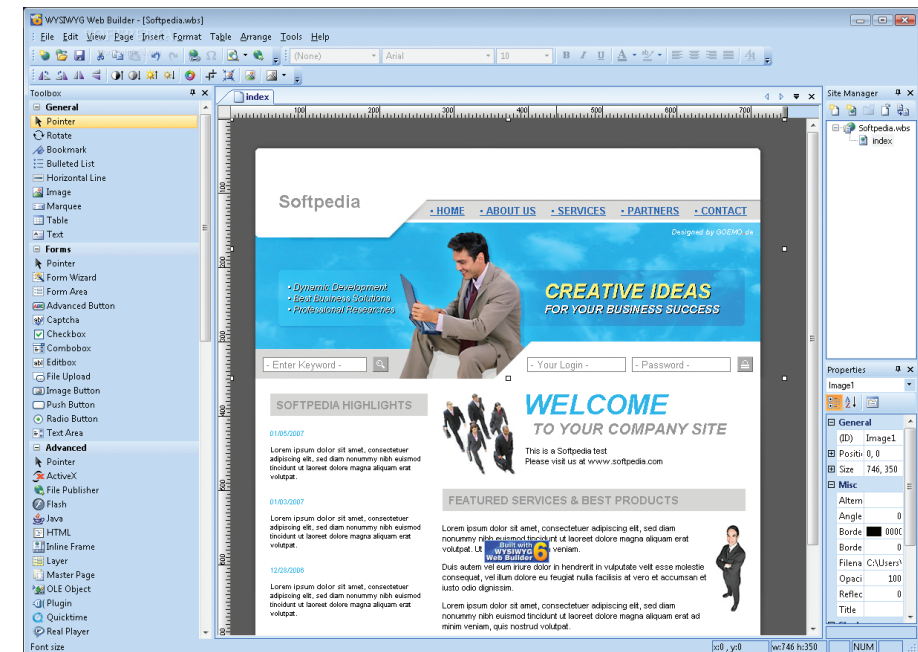


Figure 5.1 An example of a WYSIWYG editor. WYSIWYG Builder 6.5.1

Basic HTML is not hard to use, and will help you layout your content. Here are some basic HTML tags:

- **To bold:** `<strong>phrase you wish to bold</strong>`
- **To italicise:** `<em>phrase you wish to italicise</em>`
- **To underline:** `<u>phrase you wish to underline</u>`
- **To list:** `<li>lines you wish to list</li>`
- **To create a paragraph:** `<p>paragraph text</p>`
- **To insert a line break:** `<br/>`
- **To insert a link:** `<a href="page url">phrase you wish to link</a>`

The tags also help search engines identify how the content has been laid out on the page.

The best way to get to grips with HTML is to start using it online, where you can see how the tags work.

## 5.5 an introduction to key phrases

One of the most notable differences between writing for print and writing for the web is when it comes to the latter, you are writing not only for an audience, but also for the search engines. While your human audience should always be your first priority, your copy also needs to speak to the search engines in a language they can understand. This digital tactic will be covered in greater depth in the chapter *Search Engine Optimisation*.

### note

Search engines trawl and read the content on your website using spiders. Not the creepy crawly kind, the clever little bit of code kind. Read more about how this works in the *Search Engine Optimisation* chapter.

Optimising your copy for search engines is important because your target audience is likely to be using a search engine to try and find the products or services you are offering. If the search engine is not aware your content can give its users the answers they are looking for on a particular subject, then it won't send traffic to your website. Without traffic, you can have all of the juicy, useful content in the world and it's not going to meet your marketing objectives. Optimising your content for search is thus the process of communicating to search engines the content you are publishing. The use of keywords and phrases is an integral part of this.

### 5.5.1 Key Phrases

A keyword refers to the word used in a search query and a key phrase refers to more than one word used in the search query.

Keyphrase research is an important element of digital copywriting. Having identified the themes of your web pages, keyword research should be used to identify what phrases your target audience uses when searching for you. It is

important to know what people are searching for, so that you can give them what they need.

Once you have a good idea of the words people are using to find information online, you can use these phrases in your copy as a signal to search engines that your content is relevant to their users.

A good copywriter is able to weave a predetermined set of key phrases into a piece of copy seamlessly, so that the reader cannot detect that they have been included.

Each page should be optimised for a primary key phrase, and can be optimised for a secondary and tertiary key phrase as well. Usually a web page is optimised for three key phrases, but can be optimised for up to five (though only if the page is very long). Any more than that and you are better off creating new, niche web pages.

Key phrases can be integrated into nearly every type of content that you write for the web.

### note

In the chapter called *Search Engine Optimisation*, there is more detail on the process of keyword discovery and keyword selection.

## 5.6 types of web copy

Whether it is long or short, the purpose of content is to communicate a message. By its nature, communication implies both that the message has been received and understood. The considerations covered here are aimed at ensuring that when you distribute a message, it is communicated effectively to the people who need to receive it.

In order to communicate the intended message effectively, content needs to be

- Clear and concise
- Easy to read
- Well-written
- Well-structured

Content written for the web can be divided into two broad categories, short copy and long copy. The division is by no means scientific.

### 5.6.1 Long Copy

The title, 'long copy' is somewhat misleading. As online readers behave slightly differently to offline readers, it is unlikely that a skilled copywriter will be called on to create copy for the web that is longer than 800 or 1 000 words per page. Of course, there are exceptions to this.

That is not to say that online copywriting is just about short, sharp Call to Action copy that we will discuss in the next section. However web users do tend to scan pages quickly to determine whether or not they will read further. Specifically in longer copy, you need to take this into consideration.

Longer copy does have advantages. Primarily, it allows you to provide more information and encourage the reader to convert. You can foster a relationship with a reader, whether it is on a blog, through email communications or through articles and news releases. With more words and space available to use, you are able to build a voice and a personality into your writing.

There are many types of long online copy. Here, we will focus on a few that are useful for marketing:

- News releases
- Articles for online syndication
- Emails
- Blog posts

Bear in mind that this is by no means an exhaustive list.

## News Releases

The news release is a stalwart of public relations. As the Internet grows, so does the overlap between PR and Marketing. As a result, many copywriters are called upon to write news releases for online distribution as it is a standardised format for releasing information. Originally intended to provide information for journalists, news releases are increasingly being read without going through the journalists first.

The screenshot shows a news article on the Bizcommunity.com website. The article title is "Quirk Education offers UCT students free courses". It is categorized under "Digital" and "Marketing". The text of the article states: "Quirk Education has donated more than R50 000 worth of courses to the Southern Africa Sustainable Development Initiative (SASDI), an organisation that focuses on fundraising, project management and leadership development within impoverished communities. Eight University of Cape Town students working with SASDI have enrolled in Quirk Education's Quirk Certificate Course in eMarketing - the most relevant form of digital accreditation in and outside the marketing industry. Founded with the production of the first edition of Quirk Education's textbook in 2008, the institution expanded in 2009 to the provision of courses, offering an eMarketing accreditation in 2009 and running as a distance learning provider in early 2010. The purely online course - endorsed by University of Stellenbosch Business School Executive Development - is completed over a period of 10 weeks and covers every facet of eMarketing, giving both professionals and students the opportunity to learn how to practically apply holistic Internet marketing tactics to their business." Below the article, there is a "Community activity" section showing user profiles and their recent activity.

Figure 5.2 A news release on Bizcommunity.com

## Articles for Online Syndication

Online article syndication involves writing articles that are in no way a direct promotion of your site. In other words, they are not press releases. These articles are written to provide information and valuable content to readers about something which is indirectly related to your product or service.

Articles are submitted to online article directories, from where they are picked up and republished on other sites.

As the articles contain links and key phrases relevant to your site, the benefits for SEO are excellent. But the strategy won't work unless people want to read your articles - so they need to be broad, informative and not just thinly disguised adverts. You are aiming to inform your audience, position your brand as experts in your field and demonstrate authority and thought leadership.

There are a few key steps to writing an article for syndication.

### Step 1: Choosing your Topic

By looking at your website's content themes and key phrases associated with them, you will be able to write targeted, key phrase rich articles. Listening to the conversations around your brand, and seeing what customers are saying, can also lead you to topics relevant to your website and your customers.

### Step 2: Write about it

Bear in mind the primary goal of your content is to be informative and valuable to your readers. The secondary goals are the promotion of the brand you're representing and search engine ranking benefit you get from publishing content online. These are all things that should be considered when you are planning the material for your article. In addition, it not only has to be in keeping with the brand for whom you are writing, but it also has to be written using a style and form that is engaging to users. Following the best practice guidelines discussed in the next part of this chapter will go a long way toward ensuring that you get this right.

*Steps 3 and 4, relate to distribution, and will be covered in-depth in the chapter WebPR.*

### Step 3: Get the article out there

Publishing the articles to directories means they can be picked up and republished on other sites, which contributes significantly to linkbuilding efforts. There are hundreds of online article directories out there but you need to be selective when choosing which ones to submit to. The good article directories usually allow up to four links to be placed in each article, which allows you flexibility in terms of linking back to your site but doesn't make the article seem like spam.

### note

If a chocolatier wrote an article on the benefits of eating dark chocolate, without directly promoting their own product, this would be an example of an article written for online syndication.

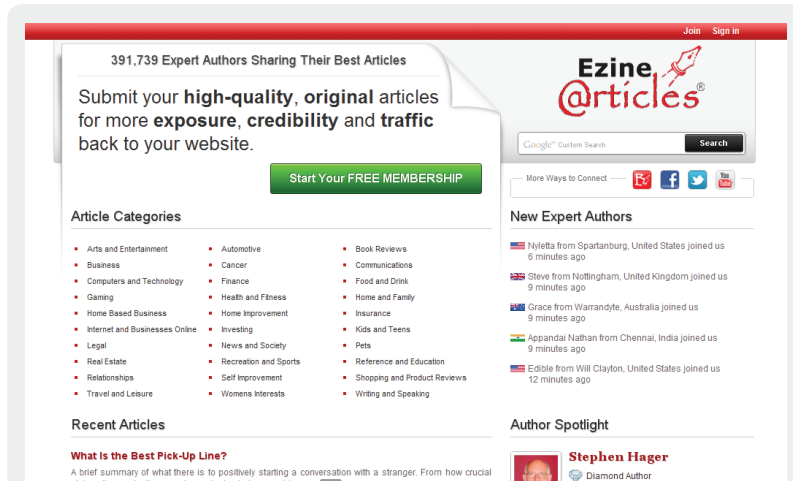


Figure 5.3 Ezine Articles is an example of an online article directory.

From here people who are interested in republishing the article on their own sites/blogs can do so as long as they reproduce the content exactly as you have submitted it. If the article is well-written and informative it has the capacity to go viral. This is the ultimate goal as the more times it is republished the more links you will acquire – and all at no cost to you.

#### Step 4: Monitor its progress

A bit of basic online reputation monitoring will enable you to keep an eye on where your article is being republished and that it is being republished correctly.

## Emails

Email marketing is an integral part of many marketing strategies. Of course, content is a huge part of this: it is the words in an email that a user engages with.

By virtue of their nature, emails are the ideal medium for communicating with your consumers and building relationships with them.

Successful email campaigns provide value to their readers. This value can vary from campaign to campaign. Newsletters can offer:

- Humour
- Research
- Information
- Promotions

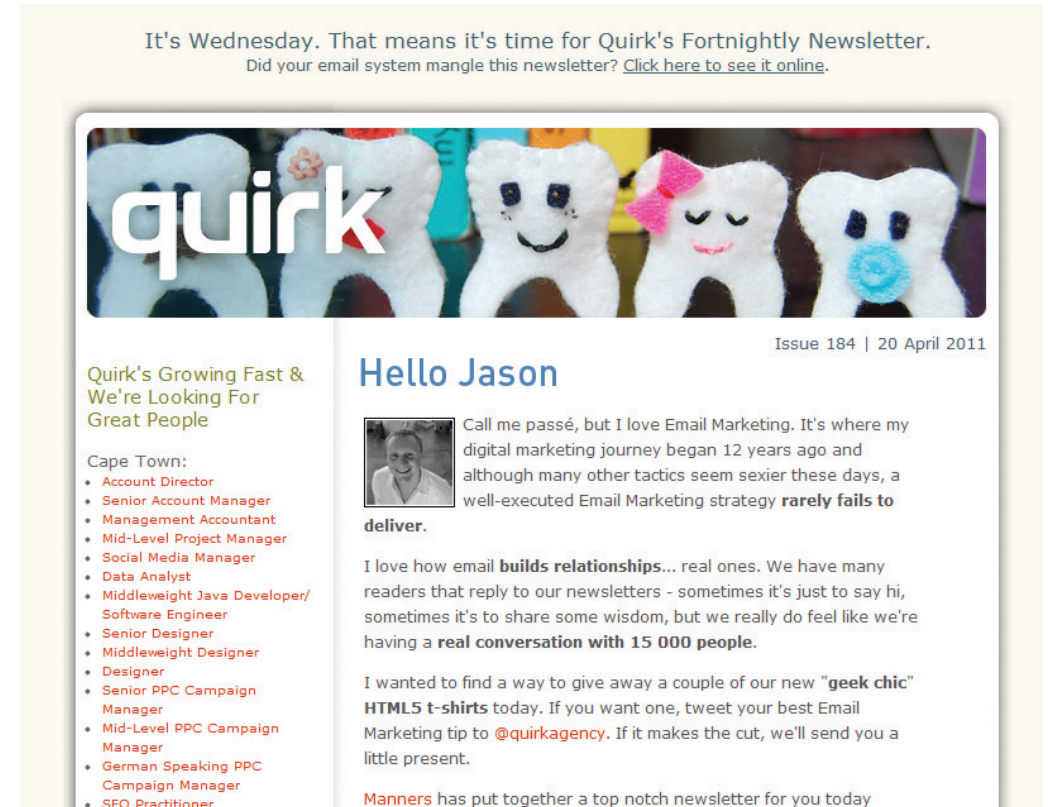


Figure 5.4 Quirk's newsletter, packed with useful information, goes out fortnightly.

## Blog Posts and Blogging

Blogs can be very successful marketing tools. They're an excellent way to communicate with staff, investors, industry members, journalists and prospective customers. Blogging also helps to foster a community around a brand, and provides an opportunity to garner immediate feedback on developments. This is an audience made up of players vital to the success of a company - which is why it is important to get blogging right.

There is plenty to be gained from the process of blogging and obviously, the value, as with email marketing, lies in the content. This communication channel provides an opportunity for you to foster an online identity for your brand as well as giving your company a voice and a personality. This happens through the content you distribute as well as the tone you use to converse with your readers. There is more information on blogging in the chapter *Social Media Channels*.

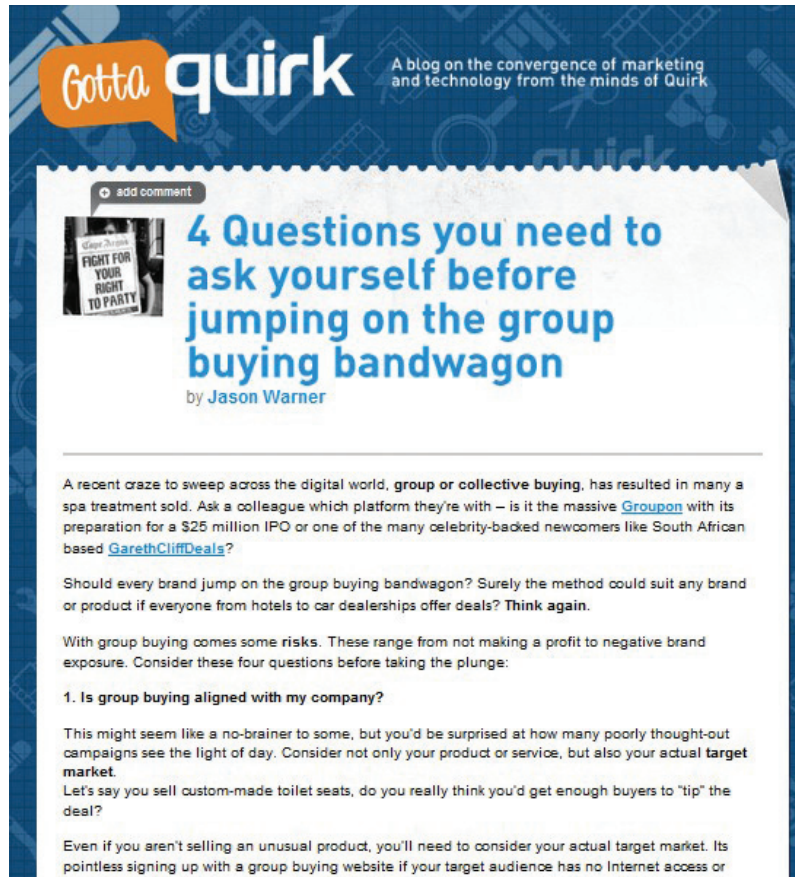


Figure 5.5 A blog post on GottaQuirk.com

## 5.6.2 Short Copy

Online copy often has only a small amount of space and a short amount of time to get a message across to a visitor, and entice them to take action. This is especially true of banner advertising and PPC adverts on search engines, but is also important across all digital marketing disciplines. Probably the most important short copy is the Call to Action.

### The Call to Action

Users scan web pages and look for clues as to what to do. Tell them. A Call to Action is a short, descriptive instruction that explicitly tells a reader what to do (for example, "click here"). Banner advertising usually involves a clear Call to Action, and they can also be used in paid search advertising. Call to Action copy is not limited to short copy: email newsletters and promotions should also make use of Calls to Action, and we even see them all over web pages.



Figure 5.6 A Call to Action should be short and to the point.

Any time there is an action you want a reader to take, a Call to Action should instruct the visitor what to do. This means using active verbs when you write, and crafting hyperlinks to be clear instructions that resonate with your visitor at each step in the conversion process.

A good Call to Action resonates with the action the visitor needs to take, as opposed to the technical function that is performed. For example, if a user has entered an email address to sign up to your email newsletter, the action button should say "sign up" and not "submit".

Consider as well what actions mean offline. Again with email newsletters, "sign up" can have very different connotations to "subscribe". Further, "subscribe" is very different to "subscribe for free". Whereas subscriptions have connotations of costs, "sign up" does not carry the same burden. However, "subscribe for free" could imply greater value – something that would normally carry a cost is available to you for free.

### Titles and Subject lines

Titles and subject lines often form part of a body of long copy. However, they are important enough to be discussed as stand-alone short copy. Titles and subject lines are there for a very important reason: they inform a reader whether or not they are likely to want to read further. They are the gateway to your content.

Consider the following two titles:

*Guide to online copywriting*

*Ten steps to online copywriting that sells*

The second title conveys more information to the reader, information that helps the reader to make a decision to read further.

#### Why Should you Care?

Online media allows for direct feedback, making finding your audience much easier. Getting their location and demographic right is vital and they are all on social networking sites. Are you **maximising** on engagement, or simply shooting the breeze?

#### note

Use active verbs for sentences in the active voice. This sentence is in the active voice. Passive verbs can be used, but tend to make for less instructive copy. Passive voice is being used in this sentence.

Subject lines are like titles for emails, and can make the difference between an email being deleted instantly and being opened and read.

As with a title, use the subject line to make clear what the email is about. For example, if there is a promotion in the email, consider putting it in the subject line as well.

Titles, headlines and subject lines need to be both persuasive and enticing. Consider what need your copy is meeting for your readers, and express that first.

### PPC Adverts

PPC adverts have a very limited space, and very limited time, to get a message across, as well as plenty of competition for a reader's attention. These four lines of copy need to work hard to ensure a top return on investment.

PPC adverts follow the same basic structure:

#### Heading

Two lines of advert copy,

Which can be displayed on one line

[www.DisplayURL.com](http://www.DisplayURL.com)

With a limited word count available, it can seem a daunting task to communicate information that entices the right traffic to clickthrough, and differentiates you from your competition. Testing variations of copy is the best way to determine what works best for your campaign. While copywriters are not generally responsible for writing PPC ads, they are often brand custodians and should review all copy representing a brand.

## 5.7 SEO copywriting

A good online copywriter will have a thorough understanding of SEO and how this can be integrated into her writing. Now that you understand key phrases and indeed, how they are used in short copy such as PPC adverts, it is worth a brief look at how these can be integrated into the longer copy we write.

SEO copywriters need to know how to blend keywords into their content as well as knowing how to use them in conjunction with HTML tags and Meta Data. In addition to assisting you with structuring your content, these tags indicate relevancy and context to search engines. Some of the tags are used by screen readers, and so they assist visitors with technical limitations to access your content. The Meta description can also be used by search engines on the search engine results pages (SERPs).

Below are a few places where we tend to include key phrases on our website.

### 5.7.1 Page URL

The main key phrase for the page should be used in the URL for the page. Often, the URL is generated from the page title, so using the key phrase in the page title should ensure that it is in the URL as well.



### 5.7.2 Page Title

The page title appears at the top of a user's browser and should be able to tell them (and the search engine spiders, of course) what the main theme of the page is. The page title is limited to 66 characters (including spaces). The key phrase should be used as close to the beginning of the title as possible.

### 5.7.3 Meta Description

The meta description is a short paragraph describing the page content. This summary is usually shown on the SERPs if it contains the search term searched for, which means it needs to entice users to clickthrough. The spiders use the meta description to deduce the topic of the page and the use of targeted key phrases is important here. Copy is limited to no more than 152 characters (including spaces).

```
<meta>
<title>Quirk Marketing Agency | Born Digital</title>
<meta name="description" content="Quirk is a marketing agency. Born digital, driven by creativity and disciplined by results. Find out more about the agency's solutions and key clients." />
<meta name="keywords" content="marketing agency digital creativity results international solutions businesses connected audiences platforms campaigns software applications technology consumer agencies offices clients brand quirk" />
```

### 5.7.4 Meta Keywords

The meta keywords are a list of the words and phrases that are important on a web page. The use of targeted key phrases is important, but remember - no keyword stuffing. The meta keywords are limited to 200 characters (including spaces). This is, however, no longer a major element used by search engines. It's best to get as many elements as possible correct as we can never be absolutely certain of the search algorithms.

#### note

Each page on a website must have a unique URL, title meta keywords and meta description.

#### note

Keyword stuffing refers to putting too many keywords into the meta keywords tagging, and using keywords that are not relevant to the web page. Search engines can penalise this as a spam practice.



## 5.7.5 Headings and Sub-headings

Spiders assign more relevance to the text used in headings, so it is important to use your key phrases in the headings on your page. It also helps to structure your content.

Heading structures:

<h1> **page heading**

<h2> Sub-headings

<h3> **Information under the sub-headings**

Having a good heading hierarchy is important as spiders use it to move through your page. The hierarchy indicates what is more important and how the content is broken up.

## 5.7.6 Page Copy

The number of times you use the key phrases is entirely dependent on how long the page of copy is. You want to optimise the page for the key phrases without their use being overt.

For SEO effectiveness, a page of web copy should not be less than 250 words. On a 250 word page you could use the primary key phrase eight times (this includes use in meta data, headings, title and body copy) and the secondary key phrase four times.

### discussion point

**Why should you avoid requiring the user to scroll many times to read a page of content?**

The page should not be so long that the user needs to scroll and scroll and scroll again to get to the end of it. If you find the page is getting exceptionally long, consider breaking it into different sections for different web pages. This way you could add more pages of optimised copy focused on one theme, instead of one very long page.

## 5.7.7 Links to Your Optimised Page

The text used to link from one page to another is considered important by the search engine spiders, so try to ensure your key phrase is used when linking to the optimised page. Anchor text of links should include the key phrase of the page being linked to, and not the page being linked from.

## 5.7.8 Images: Alt Text and Title Tags

Alt text refers to the "alt" attribute for the IMG HTML tag: this is the text that appears in the caption. It is used in HTML to attribute a text field to an image on a web page, normally with a descriptive function, telling a user what an image is about and displaying the text in instances where the image is unable to load. While this is handy for readers we also use it for another reason: search engine spiders can't read images, but they can read the alt text. The image title tag is what shows when you hover with your mouse over an image and can also be read by the search engine spider.

## 5.8 best practices for online copywriting

Now that we have covered the basic theoretical principles of writing for the web, we need to look at the best practices to apply whenever you are writing copy for publication on the web. There are a number of things that you need to consider:

- Does the layout of your copy make it easier to read?
- Is your meaning clear and direct?
- Does it convey the features and benefits necessary to make your point (if applicable)?
- Will your readers clearly understand the content of your writing?
- Is the content of your message structured in a logical manner?

The rest of this chapter will be dedicated to ensuring that you have the knowledge and tools to answer these questions.

## 5.8.1 Layout and Legibility

As we have mentioned already, readers process content differently online to the way that they read offline. Both can be for leisure purposes. However, online, readers tend to scan text rather than read every word.

As a result, online copy is judged at first glance, not just on content, but first and foremost on its layout. It needs to appear to be easy to read before a user will choose to read it.

Digital copy should be easy to scan. This means making use of:

- Clear and concise headings
- Bulleted and numbered lists
- Short paragraphs
- Bold and italics
- Descriptive links

It's easy to see this in practice.

Our success is primarily a result of how we are organised. Unlike many agencies, **our model is built-for-purpose** and focuses on an approach we call T.C.E.O.:

- Think
- Create
- Engage
- Optimise

These fields work together to result in a cohesive team capable of executing on any strategy to drive results.

**Figure 5.7 Quirk Agency Model.**

Before	After
Tea has been drunk for thousands of years, and as people are growing more health conscious, tea sales are increasing. Personal preference plays an important role in making the perfect cup of tea. However, using fresh water ensures maximum oxygen in the tea, and warming the teapot first is standard practice. Tradition dictates one teabag per person, and one for the pot. Tea is served with milk, lemon, honey or sugar, according to taste.	Worldwide, <b>tea sales are increasing</b> as people are becoming more health conscious. Here are some tips on making the <b>perfect cup of tea</b> : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>use fresh water (for maximum oxygen)</b></li> <li>• <b>warm the teapot first</b></li> <li>• <b>use one teabag per person, and one for the pot</b></li> </ul> The perfect cup of tea is based on <b>personal preference and taste</b> . Tea can be served with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>milk or lemon</b></li> <li>• <b>honey or sugar</b></li> </ul>

**Figure 5.8 Using layout to make writing more legible.**

## 5.8.2 Language

It's already been said that the basic principles of good writing still apply online. However, because you have the limited, and sometimes divided attention of your audience, it is best to keep it simple and tailor your language to your audience.

### Tone

The tone of your content should be consistent with the brand for which you are writing. If necessary, read some of the brand material to get a feel for the company's style of communication. Compare the difference in tone in the examples below.

### Example of Tone A: Investec

Since Investec was founded in South Africa in 1974, it has expanded through a combination of substantial organic growth and a series of strategic acquisitions in South Africa, the United Kingdom and other geographies.

Investec's strategic goals are motivated by the desire to develop an efficient and integrated business on an international scale through the active pursuit of clearly established core competencies in the group's principal business areas.

[\[http://www.investec.co.za/#home/about\\_investec.html\]](http://www.investec.co.za/#home/about_investec.html)

### Example of Tone B: Nando's

500 000 years ago Civilisation as we know it was born. People have started to cook with fire and the idea that food is more than just nourishment. A community spirit is emerging as people gather together around a flame, talking, sharing and laughing, in wait for their meal.

The Mozambique community is flourishing. Life here revolves around early evening feasts about the fire. Everyone joins together to share good food and their heroic stories of the day! This is where the famous story of the discovery of Peri-Peri began. It is said that a young spirited boy went exploring one day and returned late that night with the African Bird's Eye Chilli. It had been shown to him by the African people who named it Pili-Pili.

[\[http://www.nandos.co.za/nandos\\_story.html\]](http://www.nandos.co.za/nandos_story.html)

### Active vs Passive Voice

Grammatically speaking, people expect that characters execute actions that then have an impact on objects or other characters. For example: The girl ate a chocolate.

- The girl is the subject
- The action is the act of eating the chocolate
- The chocolate is the object that is affected by the action

This is known as the active voice. Unfortunately, writers often use the passive voice when writing. This turns the object into the subject. For example: The chocolate was eaten by the girl.

This is automatically translated by the human brain into the format that it expects. According to Price and Price (2000), this adds 25% to the time required to understand a sentence.

In all writing, it is better to use the active voice.

### Neologisms and Buzzwords

Sometimes the World Wide Web is referred to as the Wild Wild Web as it can seem to be an environment where anything goes. The ever expanding numbers of social media participants play fast and loose with grammar.

With new services and products being developed daily, it can feel like the list of new words, and new ways to use words, is growing faster than you can keep up. Dictionaries and reference guides celebrate this regularly with a “word of the year”, usually one that has been in heavy use by the Internet audience for the three years preceding its entrance into a dictionary.

For example, in 2005, “podcast” was voted word of the year by the editors of the New Oxford American dictionary, while “blog” had its day in 2004 when it was declared word of the year by Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary. The word “blog” was coined in 1999.

Online services can quickly become verbs in everyday language, so we talk of “Googling something” instead of “searching on Google” and of “Facebooking someone”.

#### note

**Mozilla Firefox is a free, open source browser developed by the Mozilla Foundation. As well as having improved and safer browsing, you can download extensions that let you customise your browser. You can download it for free from [www.mozilla.org](http://www.mozilla.org).**

Always remember you are writing for your users first and foremost. If your content is aimed at cutting edge early-adopters, then litter it with the latest buzz words. If your audience does not know the difference between Mozilla Firefox and Internet Explorer, then be cautious when using a word that did not exist the day before.

Users dictate your copy.

### Features and Benefits

Writing compelling copy means conveying to readers why they should perform an action. While features may seem all important, you need to communicate the benefits of the features to the user.

- **Feature:** a prominent aspect of a product or service which can provide benefit to users. It describes what the product does.
- **Benefit:** the positive outcome for a user that a feature provides. It can be the emotional component of what the user gets out of the product.

Features and benefits are very different. Features are important to the company that provides the product or service. Benefits are important to those who decide to use the product or service.

For example, consider a home entertainment system. Features could include surround sound and a large flat screen television. The benefit: a cinema quality experience in your own home.

Persuasive writing makes use of features, benefits and active verbs to create appealing messages for your personas:

*Enjoy cinema quality movie nights in your own home with a surround sound home entertainment system.*

### 5.8.3 Logic

The structure of online copy can be compared most closely to the structure of a newspaper article. The headline, usually containing the most important bit of information in a story, comes first. Online, visitors need to decide quickly whether or not to read a page. As a result of this, the most important information needs to be at the top of the page.

Start with the summary or conclusion – the main idea of the article.

While clever word play in headings and titles can attract some attention, online these need to be written to be as descriptive as possible. The copy is multi-tasking: not only is it informing visitors of what to expect, it is also telling search engine spiders what the page is about.

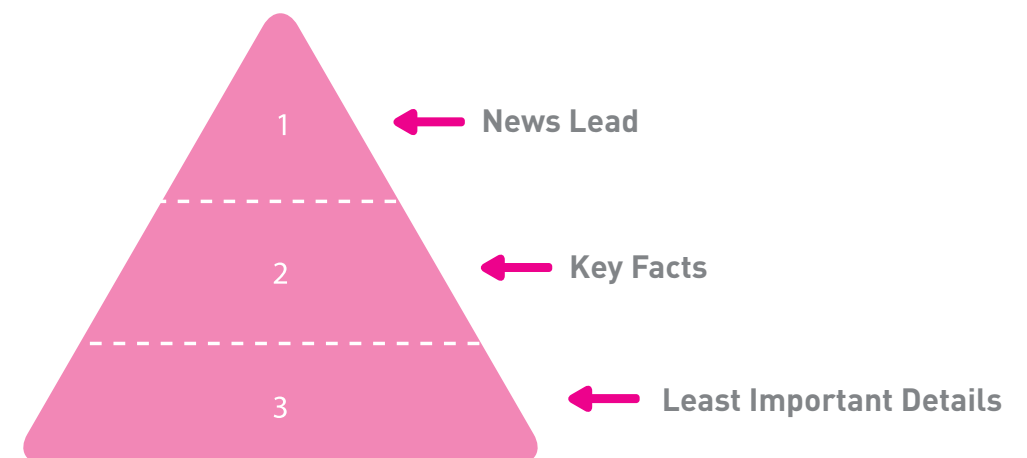


Figure 5.9 Information Hierarchy.

## 5.9 tools of the trade

The **Simple Measure of Gobbledygook** (SMOG) formula from Harry McLaughlin can be used to calculate the reading level of copy that you have written. A SMOG calculator, and instructions for use, can be found on his website: [www.harrymclaughlin.com/SMOG.htm](http://www.harrymclaughlin.com/SMOG.htm)

Alternatively, [www.flesh.sourceforge.net](http://www.flesh.sourceforge.net) offers a Java application that produces the Flesh-Kincaid Grade Level and the Flesh Reading Ease Score of a document.

For an **online dictionary** and an **online thesaurus**, you can visit [www.dictionary.reference.com](http://www.dictionary.reference.com) and [www.thesaurus.com/](http://www.thesaurus.com/). Thinkmap's **Visual Thesaurus** at [www.visualthesaurus.com](http://www.visualthesaurus.com) is also a thesaurus, but with an interactive map that lets you explore words. It's easy to spend a lot more time on this website than you originally planned!

When it comes to **keyword research**, there are a host of tools available. Some are listed below:

- SEO Book - [tools.seobook.com/firefox/seo-for-firefox.html](http://tools.seobook.com/firefox/seo-for-firefox.html)
- Wordtracker - [www.wordtracker.com](http://www.wordtracker.com)
- AdWords - [adwords.google.com/select/Login](http://adwords.google.com/select/Login)
- Trellion's Keyword Discovery Tool - [www.keyworddiscovery.com](http://www.keyworddiscovery.com)
- Hitwise Keyword Intelligence - [www.keywordintelligence.com](http://www.keywordintelligence.com)
- SEO Chat's Keyword Suggestions for Google - [www.seoachat.com/seo-tools/keyword-suggestions-google](http://www.seoachat.com/seo-tools/keyword-suggestions-google)

## 5.10 summary

Online copy is at the foundation of a website. It is constantly in view – and more often than not the focal point of a page. Good online copy can also be the difference between a site seeing regular traffic or becoming stagnant.

Your writing needs to have the reader in mind first and foremost. The copy should be strong, yet easily readable while still making maximum use of key phrases.

### chapter questions

1. When writing for the web, why are descriptive titles better than titles which play on words?
2. Why should users dictate your content? List some ways that users' needs determine content.

3. Why does web copy need to be easy to read?
4. For some real online copywriting practice, choose an article in a magazine or newspaper, and rewrite it for an Internet audience.

### 5.11 references

Buchanan, H. (17 March 2008) *What is Web Copy and How Should I Use It?*

[www.grokdotcom.com/2008/03/17/what-is-web-copy](http://www.grokdotcom.com/2008/03/17/what-is-web-copy)

[FutureNowInc.com](http://FutureNowInc.com)

[accessed 17 June 2008]

Google, *How do I use keyword insertion? (tutorial)*

[adwords.google.com/support/bin/answer.py?answer=74996&query=dki&topic=&type=f&onClick=](http://adwords.google.com/support/bin/answer.py?answer=74996&query=dki&topic=&type=f&onClick=)

Google AdWords Help Center

[accessed 17 June 2008]

Price, J. and Price, L. (2002) *Hot Text – Web Writing That Works*

New Riders, Indiana

Fishkin, R. (25 February 2006) *Beginner's Guide to Search Engine Optimization*

<http://www.seomoz.org/article/beginners-guide-to-search-engine-optimization>

[SEOmoz.org](http://SEOmoz.org)

[accessed 3 April 2008]

### further reading

- To get started on writing for the Web, *Hot Text – Web Writing That Works* is an easy to read and thorough resource. The website for the book is [www.webwritingthatworks.com](http://www.webwritingthatworks.com).
- [www.copyblogger.com](http://www.copyblogger.com) has regular articles and case studies on writing online copy that converts.
- [www.wordwise.typepad.com](http://www.wordwise.typepad.com) – Dan Santow of Edelman posts regularly on his blog with practical tips for improving your writing, whether it be emails to colleagues, blog posts, news releases or articles, and includes updates on neologisms, web words and style.
- FutureNow's GrokDotCom.com published *Online Copywriting 101: The Ultimate Cheat Sheet* over two posts, providing 101 links to the best online copywriting references on the Internet:
  - » [www.grokdotcom.com/2007/10/29/copywriting-101](http://www.grokdotcom.com/2007/10/29/copywriting-101)
  - » [www.grokdotcom.com/2007/11/13/copywriting-101-part-2](http://www.grokdotcom.com/2007/11/13/copywriting-101-part-2)