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Copywriting

*Successful writing for design,
advertising, and marketing*

Second Edition

Writing for catalogs

With 80 percent of Americans shopping from home, the Direct Marketing Association estimates that sales from print catalogs are worth over \$150 billion a year. These catalogs come in every shape and size and serve many different purposes, the main being retail and trade sales. Although they may seem to be simply a different form of brochure or website, catalogs are in fact a law unto themselves. Some catalogs are enormous businesses in their own right, others are functional directories playing supporting roles, but they all share similar characteristics.

What makes catalogs different?

Although premium retail catalogs can look and feel like glossy brochures, the two formats have very little in common and space is always at a premium in catalogs. Whereas a brochure can set its own scene and take its time presenting a concept and telling a story, a catalog has to work very hard and the copy has to make it easy to understand and use. **Trade catalogs** (used by businesses to market themselves to other businesses) also require the same degree of attention to detail from the copywriter.

The larger the catalog, the more difficult it is to write, because maintaining consistency in tone of voice and word counts, and avoiding repetition, becomes even more of a challenge. If an advertisement is a sprint, a catalog is a marathon. Your skills for this must include accurate scheduling and time management of your own writing, as well as excellent creative writing skills. Whatever the type of catalog, the words and messages you create for it have to attract interest, guide the reader, present products appealingly, and close the sale. At the same time your copy has to build a close relationship with the reader.

“Catalog” is an all-embracing term that covers many different types of publication, but essentially every catalog is a list or database of one type or another. Catalogs should present a collection of information—usually about products of one sort or another—in an ordered, accessible, and attractive format.

In reality it is rare to find examples of good copywriting in catalogs—they usually rely on presenting detail in photographs and feature lists, with basic indexing, and therefore miss out on the opportunity to build a rapport and develop a strong relationship with the reader by using interesting, informative, and friendly copy to guide, advise, and persuade.

“The difference between writing successful long-form copy and ad copy is the degree of concentration and discipline it demands. Long-form requires endurance.”

Robert Sawyer, *Kiss and Sell*

Managing catalog copy can be complex

Copywriting a large piece of work can be complicated. Having written the **cover lines** and chapter headings, you submit your first few double-page spreads of first-draft product entries, get on with the next few, and perhaps start to develop the more creative introductions to each chapter. The amends for the first spreads land on your desk just as you are in the middle of the others. You somehow fit the amends in too. As the weeks go by you can be looking at multitudes of second- and third-stage amends to all aspects of the copy, and be asked to simultaneously proof and mark up your copy on the typeset pages as they come through from artworking. Getting things out of the door becomes the key objective, and this can compromise your ability to control the quality and style of the copy.

This means you may have to “push back” and challenge the necessity of making certain client amends, which may break from the catalog’s tone of voice or layout rules. You need to approach this simply, justifying your comments by explaining how you are managing the tone of voice and why this is important. There will, of course, be justifiable amends, and you have to see to these and focus on the resulting copy.

Everyone who is asked to approve a proof is likely to have some comments and amends but unless these reflect the professional opinions of members of the project team, it’s best to keep them to the bare minimum. Rely on tact and diplomacy to begin with, detailed reasoning as your next step, and a creative strop only as your last resort.

“Our words actually change the chemistry of our reader’s brain. Those changes are filed away as bits of memory. The longevity of each bit of memory depends on the vividness of the experience being recorded.”

Theodore Cheney, *Getting the Words Right*

The store is a DIY warehouse, but the communications material focuses on all of the benefits their ranges offer, from affordable and complete solutions to the ultimate dream—the lifestyle that you have always wanted.

Kitchens

Style, craftsmanship and choice
Our range of well-made kitchens suit any home and budget



inspiration for your kitchen

Wickes

Atlanta



NEW High-gloss, Shaker-style door with chrome bar-handles

A modern take on the Shaker-style, with a high-gloss finish and long, elegant handles. When chosen in white, this collection is home to the most contemporary of kitchens.




inspiration for your kitchen

Wickes

Introduction

A better kitchen, for a better home

In today's home, the kitchen is a living room, a dining room and a family room all rolled into one. Buying and installing a new kitchen is one of the biggest decisions you'll make—it affects your lifestyle and the value of your property. We'll help you get the design, the installation, the quality, and the price spot-on.

At Wickes we offer the complete kitchen solution... a huge range of styles, materials and appliances... all the finishes, including flooring, tiles, paint and lighting... Free Design Consultant service and flexible financing. Wickes offer a professional installation service and nationwide delivery.

What else could you possibly need?

Installation is guaranteed for five years, is carried out on our behalf by qualified trades professionals from Multi-Tradezone... Wickes's biggest network of trades professionals. Multi-Assistance also provides an after-sales support and contact centre that is available during the week and all weekends... Wickes offer a professional installation service and nationwide delivery. Wickes offer a professional installation service and nationwide delivery.

And, whether you want to fit your new kitchen yourself, or use an installer, you'll benefit from the sturdy, fast-assembly design of all our base and wall cabinets. Even the back-panels which you can't see have a 15mm clearance for strength and rigidity. A 50mm service gap on all of our cabinets allows for easy plumbing access. All our cabinets are guaranteed for 5 years.

If you do find you need a little extra help, however, our Good Ideas Leaflet No. 1 is packed with tips, advice and advice on planning and fitting your kitchen.

WINNER
Kitchen range of the year
2006 House Beautiful AWARDS
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inspiration for your kitchen

Wickes

In today's home, the kitchen is a living room, a dining room and a family room all rolled into one. Buying and installing a new kitchen is one of the biggest decisions you'll make—it affects your lifestyle and the value of your property. We'll help you get the design, the installation, the quality, and the price spot-on.

Who amends your copy and why

This quick guide assumes you are writing copy for a retail or trade catalog for a large organization. You could be an employee or working for a creative agency.

Who

Your copy manager

Why

to ensure that it uses the right tone of voice, is the correct word count, and answers the brief

Who

Your creative director

Why

to ensure that it represents the brand and the creative look and feel of the publication as a whole

Who

Your immediate client

Why

to make sure that the right features are promoted, the tone of voice is appropriate, and that the facts and figures are correct

Who

Your client's trading team

Why

to give prominence or greater emphasis to entries that are selling well, or badly, and to add more details

Who

Your senior client

Why

to maintain consistency with the organization's marketing and advertising messages

It is usual to expect one or two sets of amendments, and sometimes a third set. These changes often enhance the text, but if you don't agree you must be able to justify your objections.

<p>ROLE OF THE CATALOG:</p> <p>Selling products off the page</p>	<p>APPROACH TO COPY:</p> <p>Presents compelling reasons to purchase items (USPs, offer prices)</p> <p>WOW</p>	<p>ROLE OF THE CATALOG:</p> <p>Encouraging customers to come into the store</p>	<p>APPROACH TO COPY:</p> <p>Promotes retail brand values (service, choice, value)</p>
<p>DISTRIBUTION METHOD: Mailed to the customer</p> <p>APPROACH TO COPY: Eye-catching cover lines and offers</p> <p>Very concise, compelling copy</p>		<p>DISTRIBUTION METHOD: Pick up in-store</p> <p>APPROACH TO COPY: Sophisticated cover</p> <p>Strong and clear retail brand messages</p>	

Keep an eye on the big picture

As the writer, you must consider the criteria that characterize and distinguish your catalog. What is its fundamental role? Is it supposed to be a low-cost, definitive list of products and services, or an inspiring, brand-building retail offering? How is it being distributed? Is it being picked up in-store or mailed to the customer's home? These elements will have a direct influence on your copy.

The distribution method affects the format, which, in turn, affects your approach to the copy. If it is to be mailed out or inserted in the press its overall weight will be limited, which means a limited number of pages. This can restrict your freedom to use space and make it difficult to breathe life into your copy. The paper is likely to be very thin—you can't put too much black ink on the page or it will show through to the other side, and this limits your word count.

In-store retail catalogs usually feature a full-bleed lifestyle cover image, a soft-sell headline, and a few compelling cover lines. The customer already buys into the brand and enjoys an ongoing relationship with the retailer, so these types of catalog do not have to be reinforced with very strong sales messages. Your catalog has to sit alongside and complement the rest of the retailer's point-of-sale material. It has to be a comfortable addition—giving more detailed information or additional products—to the store environment so that regular customers are likely to take a copy home as a matter of course.

By contrast, when you are writing a catalog that is distributed via the mail or carried as an insert in the press you have to work a lot harder to attract your reader's attention. You cannot assume any sort of ongoing relationship, or even any prior awareness of the brand, so you have a lot of work to do.

The cover is your catalog's advertisement for itself, and it should work as hard as any other creative advertisement. At the very least you should feature

the brand (or a strong reference to it) and some form of title, even if this just says “Summer Catalog.” Simply use your front cover as an advertisement for your catalog and flag up a compelling and unique reason why it is so good.

The cover should intrigue the reader and entice him or her to pick up the catalog and explore its pages by presenting some sort of promise. Using a garden center catalog as an example, this could range from “New ways to transform your garden” or “Everything you’ll ever need for your garden” to “Expert gardening made easy” or “Improving your gardening, improving your garden.” The angle you’ll take will depend on the directions in your brief. Pay close attention to the image and make sure your copy supports and enhances it and adds extra dimension to the overall message.

If you’re majoring on “lifestyle” (relating the catalog to the target audience by showing imagery that triggers familiar cues for them) you may want to hold back on strong sales messages and let the image speak for itself, supported by the brand and a straightforward title. This can be a very sophisticated approach and is a safe bet, which can be a major consideration: if your client is printing 13 million copies you can’t afford to take big risks with a witty headline or an obtuse concept that not everyone will relate to. Lose a small percentage of your readers on this scale and the impact on sales will be enormous. When working with the mass market you are likely to have to generalize and use the broad-brush approach.

Your alternative is to feature one or more of the best products or services on the cover as a clear example of the quality, style, and value that your client wishes to project. A single product can say everything about the entire content of your catalog, so you (and your client) should resist the temptation to splash a collection of products on the cover, as this is likely to be unfocused and unclear.

Price sensitivity and other issues of confidentiality can be of paramount importance, so be aware of the nature of your client’s competitors. There are cases when the prices in a catalog are not included in any development work and are dropped in at the very last minute before going to print. As soon as the catalog is in the hands of the public, the client’s competitors will immediately drop their prices to just below those published in their rival’s catalog. As the copywriter you are often in possession of highly sought-after information, so make sure you don’t accidentally break confidentiality.

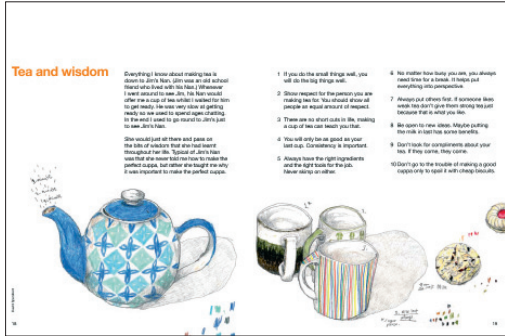
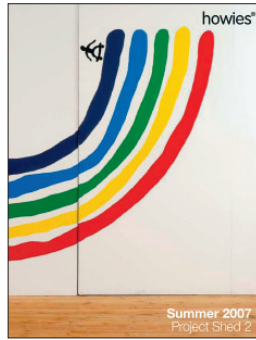
THE BIG PICTURE	THE SMALL PICTURE
1. Set a style for your headers and introductory paragraphs.	1. Write within the word counts available to you.
2. Define the tone of voice for descriptive copy.	2. Be consistent with your use of capitals, commas, and abbreviations.
3. Establish some fixed formats for listing features and prices.	3. Don’t repeat phrases or reuse descriptive words.
4. Have a clear objective that the copy must achieve.	4. Use very clear naming and version codes for your documents.

**Having ideas is easy.
Making them happen is the hard bit.**

At howies we have loads of ideas. They happen all the time. They flow freely – interrupting meetings, changing the course of plans, challenging the way we do things. Thankfully, at howies we also have some great people who can turn ideas into reality. These are the people who do stuff. They roll up their sleeves and get on with it. And when they start something, they will always finish it. So when we had the idea to turn the old shed in our car park into a fully functioning eco print shop, these people were not put off by the lack of time or indeed the lack of money. They were not defeated by the cold weather, the driving rain, the search for the right materials or the crazy vision. They just got on with the job. So this Summer catalogue is an update of where we are with the shed. It's not finished yet, but it will be. There's no doubt about that. Because we are lucky to have a great team of people. People who get things done. Praise be the do-ers.

Clare Hieatt, Co-founder of howies

Howies is about attitude, and the messages that kick off the catalog are bursting with ideas and energy, personality, and charisma. It's stream-of-consciousness creative writing and it's inspirational.



For those who don't know, the idea was to build an eco print shop in our un-used shed from the money we saved by not taking everyone on a foreign photo-shoot.

In time, the photos we took of us turning the shed into the print shop and the backdrops we built for the photo-shoot became the spring and the summer catalog.

Watch new dvds and old vhs,
 Listen to your mp3, or not at all,
 Put on your old shoes, buy a new board,
 Find new spots, skate the trusty old ones,
 Attempt new lines, get the old ones on lock,
 Push goofy or regular, even push mungo,
 Meet new people, catch up with old friends ...

“Copywriting is about being natural.”

Chlorine-free wool

Raw, untreated wool has scales that make it itchy and coarse and cause it to shrink, so most wool fabrics are treated with chlorine to reduce the scales. But chlorine is a pollutant. We try to avoid its use by slow-washing, which removes the scales on the high-quality wool found in products like our Merino Polo and Merino Waffle 1/4-Zip, for softness next to the skin with minimal shrinkage.

Uncle Dave met Patagonia founder Yvon Chouinard in the '60s when Dave was getting the famous Grand Teton Climbers' Ranch up and running.

Dave began working seasonally at Patagonia's Ventura headquarters in the early '70s and has been here ever since ... but only for six months out of the year. The rest of the year he spends in New England or Greece. At 83, Dave makes it clear he still can't be tied down. *“I can't begin to tell you about the women,”* he jokes. *“There isn't space in the catalog.”*

CHLORINE-FREE WOOL
New untreated wool has scales that make it itchy and coarse and cause it to shrink, so most wool fabrics are treated with chlorine to reduce the scales. But chlorine is a pollutant. We try to avoid its use by slow-washing, which removes the scales on the high-quality wool found in products like our Merino Polo and Merino Waffle 1/4-Zip, for softness next to the skin with minimal shrinkage.

MEN'S MERINO POLO
\$129.00

MEN'S MERINO WAFFLE 1/4-ZIP
\$129.00

MEN'S CASHMERE CREW
\$129.00

MEN'S MERINO POLO
Like a long-sleeved polo, it's chlorine-free untreated wool with this classic polo collar, flat edges, and a simple pocket. Regular fit, imported.

MEN'S MERINO WAFFLE 1/4-ZIP
Soft, warm, and chlorine-free untreated wool with a waffle texture. Regular fit, imported.

MEN'S CASHMERE CREW
Like a soft crewneck t-shirt, this crewneck is made of 100% cashmere. Regular fit, imported.

MEN'S MERINO POLO \$129.00 | S: 032 | M: 033 | L: 034 | XL: 035

MEN'S MERINO WAFFLE 1/4-ZIP \$129.00 | S: 032 | M: 033 | L: 034 | XL: 035

MEN'S CASHMERE CREW \$129.00 | S: 032 | M: 033 | L: 034 | XL: 035

MEN'S CASHMERE HOODY FULL-ZIP
\$129.00

SINGLE DAVE
Uncle Dave is the founder of Grand Teton Climbers' Ranch and has been working seasonally at Patagonia's Ventura headquarters in the early '70s and has been here ever since ... but only for six months out of the year. The rest of the year he spends in New England or Greece. At 83, Dave makes it clear he still can't be tied down. *“I can't begin to tell you about the women,”* he jokes. *“There isn't space in the catalog.”*

MEN'S CASHMERE HOODY FULL-ZIP \$129.00 | S: 032 | M: 033 | L: 034 | XL: 035

Interview: Vincent Stanley, Patagonia

Vincent, a published author and poet, is the in-house senior copywriter at Patagonia. He spends half of his time managing the editorial department and the rest writing pieces, managing the company voice, and looking after the writing of the catalog and website. With what time that leaves he is busy with his creative writing, and still loves traveling. He has combined traveling with copywriting for more than 35 years, and should be saluted as a true master of the craft!

Aged 17 I traveled with a backpack and portable typewriter with dreams of being a writer. When I came back, Patagonia was just evolving from a climbing-equipment firm into an outdoor-clothing one. I thought I'd spend six months there to get money to travel but it's now more than 35 years!

During the 1970s, Patagonia produced one catalog a year, perfect bound, with beautiful photos. It used two primary writers and had a simple, clear voice with a lot of authority, from the point of view of the expert climber. The values are much the same now, and the company has the same owners. When we started we turned over \$200,000 a year; now we do \$275 million!

I was sales manager but didn't want full-time work as I wanted to write. I quit and freelanced for 15 years, working for Patagonia and others. I drew on my experiences as a feckless traveler and have had a lot of fun writing for them.

I was always around climbers (although I'm not one myself) and I take their voices and make it the company's. It's quite easy for me to develop this but it's hard to provide the direct experience. If I have to write about places I haven't been I look them up in books. Some of the other writers can provide the real climbing experience. Patagonia takes tremendous care to ensure a product works brilliantly for its intended use, so there's plenty to say, but we need real climbers and surfers as writers for their genuine experience of the sport.

The culture of Patagonia is about climbers and surfers, and their attitude to life, which is close to mine, but we aim for a fairly neutral tone of voice. The aim is to convey their values and attitudes: they are playful, anti-authoritarian, and interested in the natural world, as opposed to the artificial world of commerce. There is a strong environmental component to the voice. Climbers would go back to spots they'd visited and find them damaged by pollution or climate change. This started in the 1980s and now is a primary concern. We run an environmental

campaign every year, and the catalog has at least one environmental aspect linked to this.

The copy is now a lot shorter but the voice is essentially the same. We used to have every product in the catalog, but now we only have about 25 percent at any one time. We dedicate about half the space to selling products and half to branding, which includes introducing our environmental stance, essays from the field, and full-page photos.

We're learning how to make the best use of the Web. The catalog sells off the page, but 70 percent of business comes through the net, and it also sends people into stores. We use the same product copy but most online copy is bullet-point technical detail that visitors access by clicking on pictures. This is a completely different process from using a catalog. We put a lot more information on the Web. Long pieces have to change, with shorter paragraphs to suit reading on the screen. It is a different kind of content.

We use about seven freelance writers each season. We have in-house editors and some writers. We have a tone-of-voice guide, which I wrote, with examples of good and bad copy, and tips such as "write as though you're writing to a friend." If a writer likes fly-fishing, we use him or her on fly-fishing, surfers write surf stuff, and women write about the women's gear. It's hard for men to write credibly about, say, bra copy. Technical climbing pieces lack authenticity if not written by a climber. A lot of good writers never get the knack of our copy. It needs to be along the lines of poetry—you have to get so much across in just two or three lines.

I am part of a coterie of writers using copy to pay the bills: a couple are quite successful, one as a novelist, the other as a nature writer. I edit a lot these days: I find this easier as it doesn't seem to use the same part of the brain as writing copy. Copywriting is about being natural. When you get stumped you start to strain in order not to be boring, and then you do your worst writing.

Interview: Kate Tetlow, Jupiter Design

Kate is part of the copywriting team at Jupiter Design in the UK, specializing in marketing communications that includes catalog copywriting for the big catalogs for Boots and Argos. As a studio writer, Kate works across a number of clients and has to adapt the tone of voice to suit each brand accordingly.

I work on all types of catalog writing, from product entries and body copy to creating new voices for development ranges and managing tone of voice across a publication. There are lots of different challenges in terms of organization, maintaining structure, and accuracy, and there is always lots of information to gather (and lots of checklists to work through). The creative writing almost comes last, and with so many space restrictions in a catalog, the trick is to create the right mood with a suitable adjective here and there to ensure the copy does not become too listlike.

My starting point is usually an overview brief, although this could be the same from one year to the next. Either with other writers or alone, I create some copy guidelines that tell the client the sort of information we need in order to write the catalog.

There are a few techniques that can help minimize repetition and can create the correct voice. For example, in one gift guide I run the copy on directly after the product title to avoid having to repeat the name and to make the best use of space. We also avoid using “you” in the text, because the benefits are not for the reader, they are for the recipient of the gift that the reader selects.

We try to work to a set of guidelines or rules for each catalog, but it is difficult to keep everyone on track, especially when a number of people in the client company are approving and amending copy simultaneously. If we have any difficulty getting the client to sign off the copy, we include a note saying “this copy is in line with the agreed tone of voice” to help control consistency. Clients are easier to manage than suppliers of the products, who often insist on the copy being in their own brand style. They have often paid to be in the catalog and we have to be sensitive to their needs without unbalancing the overall tone.

Initially, a new catalog becomes a full-time job for me, and sometimes for our other writers too. As the project progresses, our approved copy is sent to artworking and we start to receive these typeset pages for checking. These can come back to us in a fairly random order, so we have different copy at different stages. It can be very difficult to schedule this work or predict the time it will take to complete the whole project. When the overall deadline is so far away it is important to be disciplined and not let anything slip.

The brief for the premium fine-fragrance catalog (which we called “Heaven Scent”) for Boots was to create a magazine feel. The designer and artworker created a template for the spreads (using some of my sample headlines and introductory copy) and gave me the word counts (telling me how many words I could use on each layout). We decided to use far fewer words than the previous versions in order to create a premium feel, and I kept the copy to the bare minimum to give more emphasis to the photography, which ensured an elegant appearance. Fragrances are hard to describe so they need enough words to do this, and I tried to give the copy quite an indulgent feel without waffling. The way fragrance houses write is really over the top, so it was about stripping that back to something everyone could relate to. I created a mini tone-of-voice guide so that the client knew how to approve the copy consistently for style as well as for content, and this was all approved before we began the task of building the catalog.

We stripped out all nonessential copy to give the pictures maximum impact. It is a short catalog so we didn’t need to include navigation, for example. I had to conduct a lot of research on how to describe fragrances, and I learned about top notes and base notes, and how to explain these concepts in plain English. Some of the perfumes were new products that had not



Dior Midnight Poison
 Dior's classic Poison returns with a new twist. Mysterious and deeply seductive, Midnight Poison is a spellbinding scent for an enchanting woman. With the fruity top notes of mandarin and bergamot, a heartnote of rose, and the lingering warmth of patchouli, amber, and bourbon vanilla.

Lacoste Touch of Pink
 At once classic and modern, Lacoste Touch of Pink is fresh, feminine and full of youthful sensuality. Notes of blood orange and dark, luxurious violet add sweetness and charm, while lingering jasmine shows her more seductive side.

“I aim to highlight the benefits for the reader wherever possible.”

been launched, and all I had to work with was a few lines from the PR agency, while some other information arrived late and had to be built in later.

In the introduction, I tried to create an excited feel, similar to that in women’s fashion magazines. And in the product copy, I tried to talk about the personalities that each perfume would be suitable for, as if the reader were choosing a gift for someone. Avoiding repetition is key, not just with individual words but also with sentence structure, which should always vary in length. I maintain an idea of every product while writing each individual description to avoid over- or underselling any of them.

Working closely with the designer, I did some last-stage editing to combine some product entries and achieve the best look and feel on the page. There were hardly any amends and we have all been pleased with the finished result, and the impact it has had in the marketplace.

With all of my copy I aim to highlight the benefits for the reader wherever possible, but I think that catalogs sometimes are the exception to this rule. If you have a double-page spread of hairdryers, for example, you have to highlight the features because this is the only way the customer can differentiate between the similar products. You have to give them the hard facts so that they can compare and contrast easily. A good idea is to include a summary box of the features and their specific benefits, so that the product entry can simply list the features for comparison.

Why are catalogs so effective?

Catalogs are a form of shopping, and they do such good business because they are so easy to use, in every sense. For some of us, nothing beats the experience of wandering around a store, finding our favorite things, talking to the sales assistants, and carrying the stuff home, where our lives become enriched as a result. Some of us don't like the hassle. We find it too much trouble to park, with too many people getting in the way and too much pressure to buy. Many of us live a long way from the stores. When writing a catalog, put yourself in your reader's shoes—you're writing for people who prefer home shopping to going into town—and give them what they need, both with the clarity of your information and the helpful and inviting tone that you use.

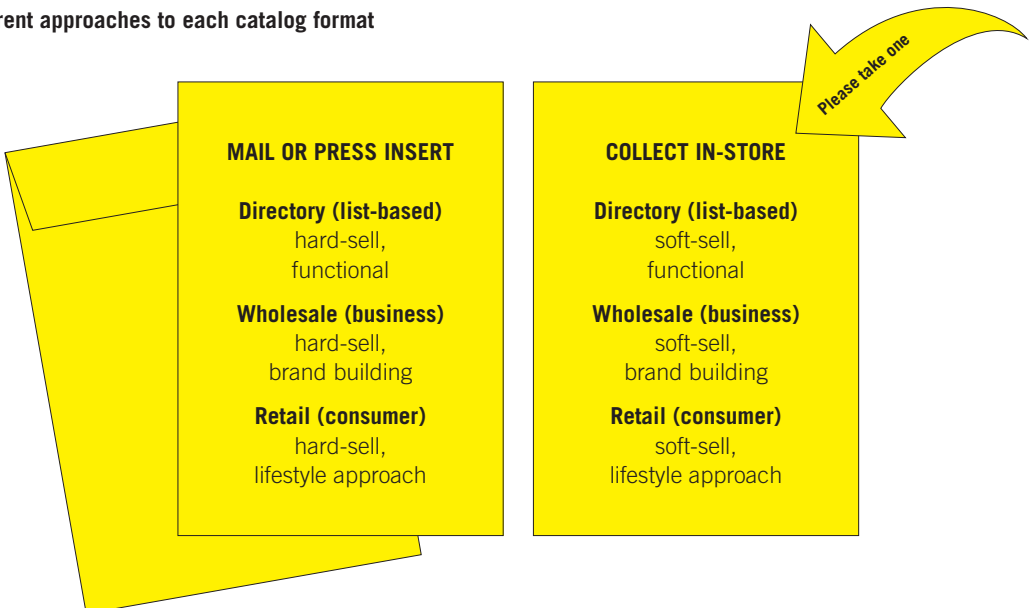
Catalogs are retail environments that the customer controls. Reading a catalog is not at all like visiting a store. The reader can browse, compare, and contrast in comfort and at leisure. The purchase can be discussed with friends or family, and there is no one trying to close the sale, which can lead people either to buy something they may not really want, or to walk away when they really did want to make a purchase.

Knowing that your readers (as opposed to the others who don't want to read it at all) prefer catalogs and like the benefits they bring, you can talk to them from the perspective of a trusted friend or adviser, and guide them through the process of buying by using a reassuring and interested tone of voice: for example, "The curse of having a large garden is the amount of grass-cutting you have to do, but these sit-on lawnmowers turn the chore into a pleasurable pastime." This can be a lot more effective than trying to adopt a heavy-sell approach with every item (unless you are creating a discount prices catalog).

How catalogs interact with the reader

The major characteristic of a catalog is that it contains a range of information that needs to be easily accessed by the reader. A catalog features multiple products or messages, and your challenge as the writer is to organize and present the content in the most digestible way possible, with clear navigation, strong branding, well-presented product and service benefits, and a clear call to action.

The different approaches to each catalog format



The three main types of catalog are directories (which are usually used in business-to-business marketing), wholesale (which are also mainly for trade purposes), and retail (which sell to the consumer directly off the page or entice the reader into the retailer's store).

Knowing how much to say about each product is a big decision. Companies that specialize in creating catalogs for older customers (such as charity fund-raising catalogs) may expect you to include sizes, weights, colors, and fine details that cannot be communicated by a photograph, such as how something should be operated or who would benefit the most from it.

Pace yourself to help maintain a consistent voice throughout every page. You'll be able to write brilliant entries for some products but this may simply serve to highlight weaknesses in entries for products about which you have less to say. Resist the temptation to repeat common phrases and reuse the best descriptive words.

Manage your use of vocabulary precisely and sparingly. If one product is "perfect for ..." how will you describe another product? Once you have used "exceptional quality," "unbeatable value for money," "unrivaled performance," or "specially formulated to ..." you may find yourself running short of alternatives in a situation where you might be writing over a thousand entries. If this is a problem you can consider opting for bullet points to avoid repetition. Always use the same number of bullet points for each product, and present information in the same order to allow for easy comparison.

Understanding and relating to your reader

Before immersing yourself in the specific brief on your table, think about yourself and the catalogs you might use and consider how customers will use yours. Theoretically, just about every household in the US has a Sears catalog, and in the UK an Argos catalog. What about you? Do you have one? How do you use it? One thing is certain—you know the catalog, and even if you don't shop at Sears or Argos, you are bound to have used one of their catalogs to browse through the available options when considering a purchase.

You're likely to begin by flicking through the catalog until the categories you're looking for turn up, as if by magic. If not, you'll try the contents page. Color-coded edges to the pages with section headers as labels work very well for this. You probably flick through it from the back to the front, and definitely won't look at every page. Your conclusion should be that clear navigation is the starting point for any good catalog.

As a catalog shopper, when you're looking at a product range you'll use the pictures as your starting point, identifying the items that you're most interested in and checking their price points. Quality photography is therefore essential, with positioning copy to set the scene for the section as a whole. Your copy will support these images, but you won't always get to see the images yourself when writing the entry. You will be lucky to get a manufacturer's specification sheet, and this is likely to be a list of bullet points that does little to distinguish one product from another.

You have to squeeze the little information you get very hard. Go on a journey of lateral thinking. If a camera has auto-focus digital SLR, what does this mean? It means it has the ability to focus on any image you point at and show you the exact image through the lens before you take the picture, allowing you to adjust accordingly. So what? Well, this means the photographer can take crystal-clear images consistently and with confidence. So what? Someone with one of these cameras is likely to build up a collection of great images and develop a real ability as a photographer. So what? Well, this camera can really help you enjoy photography to the full. OK. Now summarize

The product entries in the Palumba catalog are very hard-working, yet have a gentle and easy-read style. They explain each product's features, highlight benefits where possible, and explain their origin. Looks easy until you try it.

Our lovely hand-crocheted Child's Market Bag graciously expands to accommodate many gatherings.



Good Eggs
Straight from Camden Farms is a set of 6 eggs in a reusable mesh container. Left unfinished, children can apply beeswax polish to stain the eggs as a craft project.
1225 - \$7.99
1 1/2" diameter



Child's Market Bag
Our lovely hand-crocheted Child's Market Bag graciously expands to accommodate many gatherings. The bag is made from 100% cotton and crafted by a Fair Trade Co-op in Peru.
1075 - \$14.99
8" wide, 11" long

Sweep-Away Child's Broom
Our charming child-size broom is created with natural materials grown and processed in Kentucky. Sold either in natural or multi-color broom corn with a birch handle.
1083 Natural Corn - \$17.99
1084 Rainbow Corn - \$17.99
18 1/2" tall



Child's Spoon & Bowl
Our eating-encouraged Spoon & Bowl set is ergonomically designed and handcrafted from cherry wood. The set is conditioned with organic finish. To maintain the life of the bowl and spoon a small amount of beeswax polish should occasionally be applied. Made in Indiana.
1055 - \$25.99
4 1/2" diameter bowl



Good Milk & Cups
A wooden milk bottle and two cups make this set both simple and lovely. Comes with or without bell. Made in Maine.
1229 - \$8.99
5 1/2" tall bottle

Dry Goods Nesting Containers
This adorable set of three unfinished Dry Goods Containers is perfect for the natural play kitchen or a set of keepsake boxes. Made in Maine.
1224 - \$7.99
1 1/2" tall - 2 1/4" diameter



866 . 725 . 7122



Palumba.Com



A Simple Wooden Kitchen Hearth

Ascetically simple, yet expansion in function, our kitchen is created with the warmth and durability of solid cherry with walnut & birch accents. The stove, burner and faucet knobs work smoothly without the use of any metal hardware. The heavy gage stainless steel sink bowl can be removed for easy cleaning. A sliding cutting board pulls out 12" to allow access for more children. Oven and sink doors operate on pinch-free self-closing hinges. With the back of the hearth open it can be positioned against a wall or in the middle of a room. Out of the way the front handles will need to be attached with a screwdriver to get it ready for play. The price includes shipping in the continental United States.
Amish made in Indiana.
1033 - \$549.99
*24" wide, 41" tall, 15" deep
shipping included in price*



866 . 725 . 7122



Palumba.Com

The stove, burner, and faucet knobs work smoothly without the use of any metal hardware. The heavy gage stainless steel sink bowl can be removed for easy cleaning.



What to ask when taking your catalog copy brief

In addition to the usual questions you would ask when taking a copy brief (see page 27) it is important that you know exactly how your copy fits in with the overall retail marketing process. Asking these types of questions will help you to build up this wider context, which will then guide your writing.

What is it that makes this brand different from its competitors?

For example: “free home delivery within two days”

What is the business objective of this catalog?

For example: “to increase our market share in the US for digital cameras”

What is the strategy for reaching the customer?

For example: “TV advertising, retail displays, and direct mail of the catalog”

How is the customer expected to respond?

For example: “complete the coupon or go online to purchase from the catalog”

Do we know how previous versions performed?

For example: “a lot of customers found the form-filling and buying process confusing”

Are there any weak points in the process?

For example: “customers always call us, almost none use our Internet site”

Is there any research on customer likes and dislikes?

For example: “hero products [those products that feature most prominently on the page] always sell faster than the items featured less prominently”

General tips for catalog writing

Have a strong, simple cover line to create interest.

Have a clear contents page at the start.

Use color-coded, labeled page edges.

Include a friendly, editorial-style introduction.

Explain the benefits of the process early on.

Put the purchasing information at the back.

Label pages with titles, phone number, and website address.

Include introductions to each major section.

Feature key products in greater detail and size.

Present product details consistently for comparison.

Use graphic icons to represent features.

this in a short, compelling sentence. “Hit the bull’s-eye with every shot”—no, that’s too hard. “Precision photography made effortless”—no, too patronizing. “Greater control for enhanced quality photography”—maybe. The final solution will depend on the brand and the tone of voice.

Your shopper will want to compare and contrast the options. Why does one item cost twice as much as another? Do I need all of these extra features? Is the lowest-cost product enough for my needs? What does the top of the range offer me? Your body copy needs to present the key features and, ideally, the associated benefits, in a logical order that enables direct comparison.

Your copy must communicate your client’s distinctive USP wherever possible, both overtly and subtly. You can work out what this is when taking the brief. Ask the client, or your account manager, what it is that makes the brand unique. Good **brand positioning** will highlight to your readers that your brand is the best place to make a purchase because you are clearly offering better value for money, or stronger guarantees, or far better service and customer care, or a much funkier place to include as part of their cool lifestyle, or better peace of mind, or all of the above.

Your call to action (the messages that persuade the shopper to purchase, or close the sale) is as important as the navigation. This is a team effort between the client’s purchasing process managers and the copywriters. As much thought has to go into streamlining the buying procedures, making them as foolproof as possible, as goes into the explanations of them. You can only clarify what can be clarified—if the process of buying from the catalog is very complex, there will be little you can do to make it seem straightforward. Let the process managers explain the process in full to you, then see how concisely you can express this. Show them where you might have sticking points and see if they can solve the problem either by explaining it more clearly to you, or by making the process itself more straightforward (perhaps by removing a step in the procedure). You should end up with something along the lines of “Three simple ways to purchase—post, call, or e-mail.”

Creating and managing the correct tone of voice

While your objective is to develop a perfect tone of voice that flows effortlessly through the pages, with examples of great writing in every paragraph, you



Mrs. Powers Garden Gate

Our garden gate is fashioned of forged iron and features an engaging bevy of birds and bells, flowers and furbelows. At its center, a proper lady on a swing suggests the fun to be had within. Garden art at its best. Handsome enough to hang on a wall!

In a catalog of traditional home décor, the voice has to suit the brand, and McKenzie Childs get this spot-on, evoking times past

and communicating brand values of craftsmanship and attention to detail.

So you don't usually get much room for maneuver with your copy. If you learn to adapt to this restrictive environment, you will soon regard every problem as an opportunity, and every restriction as a chance to create something potent. Forget about putting personality into your product copy if there simply isn't room for it. If you're writing long product copy, stick to the facts and make sure the benefits are calling out loudly and clearly.

You have four main opportunities to weave in your client's personality: the cover; the welcome page; the section headers and introductions; and the customer information pages. There is very little space in any of these areas, but that doesn't mean you can't project a distinct personality. Less is more, so get to work on a creative concept (such as "Be Gorgeous this Christmas," from British health and beauty retailer Boots) and some punchy lines that you know you can replicate and work with. Look for a structure with a pattern that you can replicate, such as four words divided by commas, or a phrase that always begins with "Because ...," or a theme that always uses a reference to "relaxation," for example.

Begin with an understanding of your target audience. What are they like, what are they looking for and what is their relationship with your client? Develop a voice to which you feel they can relate directly, and roll this out consistently. There is a tendency in catalogs not to use copy imaginatively, so you may have to persuade the client or the creative team that there is value in giving a strong verbal identity to yours. Your copy effectively adds the voice of the sales assistant to the catalog.

Understanding all of the elements within a catalog

"Overstretching for colorful words can damage reader empathy. Stay within acceptable bounds. Once again we see hard evidence that strong direct response writing can require the discipline of vocabulary suppression. Fundraisers have to be especially careful; when their message reflects a fanatical devotion to their cause, it's time for disinterested third-person proofreading."

Herschell Gordon Lewis,
Copywriting Secrets and Tactics

Whether you are writing a catalog that is a simple directory of products and services (where your role may be as much to do with the organization and presentation of information as with creative writing), or a sophisticated retail offering (where your ability to maintain a consistent personality throughout the copy is paramount), the core requirements of your copy are the same. You need to attract interest, guide and advise, and facilitate purchase. There are several elements that you can use to a greater or lesser degree to achieve this, and the approach you take will depend on the specific brief to which you are working. Direct-sales catalogs have to grab the attention and will be more promotions-based, with exciting offers to tempt customers, while retail catalogs will take a softer approach, designed to foster long-term relations.

With a specialist catalog in a niche market (such as supplies for fly-fishing enthusiasts) you can adopt a very specific tone of voice in the knowledge that readers share the same attitudes and beliefs, while more generalized catalogs covering a number of product lines will require their own carefully controlled brand voice to speak to their customers. In these large catalogs the brand voice of the retailer (focused on the service, choice, and value messages rather than the characteristics of the specific items) should be the consistent thread running through the pages.

Putting a catalog together

The first stage (which doesn't necessarily mean you write this section first) is the **positioning statement** on the cover. Identify the brand's features and the choice, value, and quality within the catalog—is it exclusivity, or ease of purchase, or range of options, or price, or something else? The client will give you some direction, but you must evaluate this as objectively as possible. Having identified the key features, turn these into an overall benefit and encapsulate this in the correct tone of voice for the brand.



A new year. Time to look forward, discover new horizons, surf the city, be spontaneous, try something completely different ... Fat Face Spring: re-think the familiar.

And just in case you're not delighted with your kit all returns are FREE from anywhere in the UK or to any Fat Face store.

Fat Face uses copy lines in light touches, and resists the urge to go over the top. It's not frightened to be conceptual though, and phrases such as "re-think the familiar" speak volumes about the stylish and fashionable edge that characterizes the brand.

Once your reader has picked up and opened your catalog you're talking to a different audience. You now have to deliver the promise you made on the cover. What was previously a general audience is now an actively interested audience, who are much closer to becoming customers.

Focus on the way you welcome the reader and introduce your offering, how you identify and describe each section, and how you navigate the customer through your pages.

Give a clear identity to each section. The sections may be divided by product type or customer profile. You must create a style that can be used in a balanced way across every section. You may decide to be functional or descriptive ("Gifts for men, Gifts for women, Gifts for children") or you may consider a lifestyle approach ("The great outdoors, Home is where your heart is, Time for each other"). Be careful not to set yourself an impossible challenge by using a great line for one or two sections that can't be replicated across the catalog. Work on the least inspiring range first, and leave the easy ones until the end!

Your next consideration is the introductions to each section. Follow the style you've created for the section headers and draft a short paragraph to qualify the header and explain who the products or services are designed for. This is one of the few places in your catalog where you can breathe some personality into the copy, so give the readers some interesting points to provoke their interest. Push this to the limit, without breaking brand boundaries, and you should create something fresh and alive.

The bulk of the copy in your catalog will be the product entries. You, the designer, and the client have two main considerations: should each double-page spread feature one item as a **hero product**, with a larger image and longer, more detailed copy than the rest of the products? Is the product copy going to be succinct bullet points or longer copy that explains the features and benefits fully? Featuring a hero product is a great way to bring some variety to your pages and set the scene for each range, which can then be differentiated through the use of short bullet points. This is particularly suitable where the customer

Checklist: The stages of catalog copywriting

The following checklist can help you to break down your tasks and convert this marathon into a series of shorter runs.

Positioning statement on cover

Relates the message to the reader's needs or desires. It has to link to the cover image, and you should share your ideas with the designer. Take a few options with you.

1.

Welcome and brand statements

Your reader may be looking for solutions to problems rather than for specific products. Are you providing help, offering advice, or perhaps creating an environment in which to present other brands?

2.

Section introductions

The paragraph or two that you can use to open a new section are the best opportunities for some creative writing.

5.

Calls to action and buying process

You should include the purchasing and helpline numbers, and e-mail and Web addresses on every double-page spread. The buying process should be summarized at the start (a few points) and detailed at the back (frequent questions and answers).

8.

Contents description and navigation system

Don't worry about creativity or personality too much—just focus on making this very easy to understand and to follow.

3.

Section identities

Your choices range from the functional, or descriptive, to the evocative and poetic. Develop a style that you can replicate consistently. The headers should not only identify the section but should also create some appeal.

4.

Hero product copy

Choose a product to feature large on the page, and support it with copy that explains the features and benefits.

6.

Product entries

While there are arguments for long copy, or including more products for wider choice, it is best simply to list the features under each image, and support this with a table summarizing the range of features available, and their associated benefits.

7.

Supporting information

Catalogs are information repositories. The more the better, so long as it is properly edited to be accessible and easy to understand. Include a section toward the back for delivery information, returns, and other details.

9.

Index

This needs to be prepared as you go along (listing key words) and completed at the end (when the page numbers are fixed).

10.

can also visit the retail store to find out more before purchasing. Longer product copy is more effective when customers are expected to buy off the page, as it answers more of their queries and reduces their need to find out more. You can write long copy only when you have plenty of information about every product, and collecting this can be very time-consuming.

Calls to action are communications tools designed to close the sale by encouraging the reader to commit to purchasing. There should be a call to action on each spread and somewhere in your catalog you must include a detailed description of the buying process, explaining how to order and what to expect after ordering. These will probably be quite wordy and uninspiring, so consider using charts, tables, and graphic icons to support and streamline this information wherever possible.

All supporting evidence should be included in these customer information pages, in a concise form so that as many readers as possible will digest it and understand the buying process. You may also wish to include an index, which can be quite time-consuming to compile but will help the readers to navigate your catalog without any confusion. If they can't find something they'll go somewhere else, and will be disappointed with your catalog.

With each of the copywriting elements listed you can adopt a slightly different tone of voice, as they are each fulfilling quite distinct roles. You are facilitating a sales process, so be clear about your specific objectives with each individual element and ensure that each contributes effectively to the overall process. There's no room for any weak links in these self-contained purchasing chains.

Is it an online catalog too?

Some clients want an online catalog as well as a print version and may ask for the same product copy to be used in both. This can be achieved, but you'll need to plan in advance. It is important to understand the function of your product entries before you embark on writing the online catalog.

Whereas every bit of space in a print catalog is expensive and fought over by the trading teams, designers, and marketers, you are likely to have more room available online, allowing you to give the reader some additional detail about the product, if it is available. You may decide to write both entries simultaneously: one that is more succinct, to be used in print, and another, more detailed, version for the Web edition.

Writing for online catalogs

The beauty of the Web is the flexibility it gives you when it comes to creating online marketing materials. As a result, there are many different types of online catalog. It might include every product, a specific product line, or just a selection. It might have a seasonal focus or it could be an all-year-round sales tool. The tone and writing style will vary depending on the purpose and the company; for example, a small business might focus on quality and service, whereas bigger companies might quote big brands with value statements and a focus on prices.

When writing for an online catalog it's important to remember that shopping online can create customer loyalty in the same way as a visit to an offline retailer. When you visit a retailer you interact with other people, compare products, perhaps ask for advice, and a relationship of sorts is created. A customer shopping from a website can now benefit from a similar customer service experience. In today's ultra-competitive digital environment there are a host of loyalty and rewards programs, frequent-buyer schemes, member discounts, and pop-up offers available to the loyal online customer.

There will still be the casual surfer who would buy the same item from a different site without much thought, but online shoppers are increasingly Web savvy. As a copywriter, this means you have to work very hard to hold the reader's attention at all times, and to do this you have to understand how they use the site.

How are your visitors using the site?

People search and scan online, they don't read, so the copywriter has to shape the text into very short nuggets that make perfect sense on first sight. Content is accessed randomly, not in a linear way as in print, so everything has to make sense as a stand-alone message. The visitor will be flicking around, making quick decisions (they can always come back to you, so they can leave without a thought). They are very fickle and you can lose them in the blink of an eye, and maybe find them coming back just as quickly too!

You have a great retail offering, a good brand, and plenty of reasons for people to buy your products. But who is visiting your site and how do you engage with them? They could be browsing randomly, not sure what they are looking for or that they even want to buy at all. Or perhaps they are looking for a gift for someone special, or a specific product that they need, or maybe just something that solves a problem for them.

When they arrive on the site, visitors will usually stay on the top levels where they can compare items easily until they find the item they're interested in. If they know exactly what they're looking for they might just search for an item and add it to their basket, but if they're not sure they'll probably want to click for more detail—they might download a PDF, read information on screen, or print things out.

What does this mean for your writing?

Just like in print, online catalogs are all about product placement, product prioritizing, and space allocation. A typical online catalog has top-level pages that include basic information, sometimes with a hero product featured. At this level there's no room for creative writing, and your job is to provide practical and clear data such as product names, quantities, and prices—usually supported by an attention-grabbing photo.

Once the user has clicked through to a product, you can begin "selling." Just like in print, you need to consider unique selling points, the core proposition, and brand values. Don't forget to make sure your text is search-engine friendly, including key words or phrases like "Dad" or "men's razor." Writing great copy for product information will help customers to find your site using search engines and once there, identify what they want using the search tool. Avoid using too much promotional jargon in your copy, which could end up being filtered out as spam.

As with all product copy, the shorter the better. Even though there's usually more room than in printed catalogs and shoppers can scroll down the page, they don't have time to read reams of information. Their attention span is short, so get the message across quickly and succinctly. Good copywriters will kick-start sentences with the most important information and benefits for the customer. You can usually add tables or bullet points if there are a lot of product features to communicate.

Finally, don't forget a strong call to action to close the sale. It might mention an offer on the product or a particular line, or it might remind you of the unique product features that mean you just can't live without it.

Interview: Sunita Yeomans, Creative Director, argos.co.uk
Argos is the UK's largest catalog retailer, enjoying more of the market share in jewelery, toys, and electrical beauty products than any other retailer. The company emerged from the Green Shield Stamp business, one of the original retail catalog businesses. Copy has always been a core part of their approach, and their Creative Director, Sunita Yeomans, reveals the key differences in writing copy for their print and online catalogs.

Argos sells more than 35,000 general products for the home through its printed catalog and online store. Around two-thirds of the UK population—17 million households—have an Argos catalog at home, and argos.co.uk is the UK's second-largest Internet retail site. Argos serves over 130 million customers per year through its stores and takes around 6 million orders online or over the phone.

Copywriting for argos.co.uk is an ongoing process. There's a constant program to review, research, and rewrite product information and buyers' guides for the site, and the copy is critical to its success. It gets customers to the site using search engines like Google, it helps them find what they want using the Search tool, and it provides accurate information about products and their benefits.

When it comes to copy, accuracy is the main priority. We have a dedicated product information team that collates the features of every single product from numerous suppliers. The features are then prioritized and presented consistently regardless of whether the customer is shopping using the catalog or online. There's nothing worse for a customer than going online for further information on a product that they've seen in the catalog, and discovering that the specifications are different—they will not feel confident about buying. So keeping everything accurate is a huge and very important task.

The next priority is to consider all the ways a customer might refer to a product when they search—either in a search engine or on our site. The trick is to use the most common language to deliver the best search results. For instance, "Kids" is typed in more often than "Children."

The main difference between writing for the website and the catalog is the use of key words to improve search engine optimization (SEO). We include certain words and content to bring our website higher up in the search results than our

competitors. SEO can be improved by including additional content such as jargon busters, buyers' guides, and range statements, or by featuring relevant articles at certain points in the year, such as the beginning of the school term. Once customers are on the site, this added content also improves their shopping experience, helping them make informed decisions about what to buy.

We always commission professional copywriters who are talented enough to include key words while ensuring their copy reads naturally. Our strategy has always been to include good content in the catalog and on the website to make shopping easy, and we were doing this long before SEO even existed. These days, we just take a more mathematical approach to what we say on the website. It's essential not to waffle. Just because a page can be any length, it doesn't mean it should be. Copy must be concise and give the customer what they need as quickly and efficiently as possible.

As with any website, it's important to manage content carefully and keep everything up to date. Promotions are changed weekly, or more often during peak trading seasons, and all of the language is standardized to allow the site to be updated quickly. These guidelines exist to remove unnecessary debate about the best way to communicate simple messages.

Introductory copy for each section of the site is changed every six months when the new printed catalog is launched. It's written to a specific word count and is approved by both the content and creative teams. We avoid changing other copy too frequently, as SEO drops every time the copy is changed. The resulting drop in customers coming to the site can lead to fewer sales than the forecasted increase in sales generated by better copy. Our content team times changes to the copy very carefully, so that we always do what's best for our customers overall.

“We’re conscious of the fact that visitors scan and search information rather than read thoroughly online, so we write copy with this in mind.”

There’s a lot of information on our website, so it’s essential to organize it carefully to create the best possible experience for our customers. The catalog and website are grouped into product departments, and then ranges [lines]. Ranges are presented in a default position of least to most expensive but are usually segmented further to help navigation: for example, home and furniture, dining tables and chairs, ten seater, and so on. On the website customers can then select how products are listed, for example, by brand or by color, which allows them to compare and shortlist products more easily.

Initially the sections on the website copied the catalog faithfully. But we found that customers took longer to find what they wanted on the site than when they used the catalog (unless of course they typed a keyword or catalog number into the Search box). This was because the catalog is designed for people who navigate either by the index, the contents, or by flicking and scanning the pictures, but the website was restricted to a more formal navigation of clicking through menus.

With this in mind, the website was then divided into sections based on customer research and by analyzing the most frequently visited sections of the site, and search keywords. This worked well for customers who only shopped the website, but as most still used both printed catalog and the website in conjunction (for example, finding a product in the catalog then visiting the site for further information), they found the inconsistency made shopping difficult.

So we made the decision to reformat both the catalog and website at the same time. Everything was reviewed, including how many sections we would have, what they would be called, and what would go into them. And to make it easier for customers we added drop down menus to the website that listed the ranges in each department. We have also recently

introduced a few new sections to the website, such as “Kids World” and “More at Argos.” It is the first time products have been grouped by person, or by a slightly ambiguous title, but they are proving effective. The ideal solution is to dual feature (show the same product in two places); however, the catalog is already 1800 pages and would become far too big. The website allows access to ranges by a number of routes and therefore caters more effectively to an individual’s own shopping journey.

We’re conscious of the fact that visitors scan and search information rather than read thoroughly online, so we write copy with this in mind. We have to be careful to make menu listings short and informative, and we regularly test how customers respond to particular words or layouts by live testing, observational research, and sometimes eye tracking.

We always try to communicate the Argos tone of voice online. When it is done effectively it does have a positive impact on how customers perceive us as well as how much they spend. We are constantly championing benefit-led product copy that demonstrates our customer focus and expertise.

The area where we can usually succeed in communicating our personality is through promotions and offers. We give them short, snappy names and bring together the deal, the product or range, and a picture. We have recently introduced Hot Deals, with a flame graphic for the “o.” The language is full of personality, and the hot theme is used on all hero offers.

Looking ahead, we either need a phrase library that allows the content team to select the most appropriate phrase—for example, “Summer sizzler” for a half-price barbecue—or we need a copywriter on standby to write the words as soon as we select the products. We work very quickly, and hero products can change right up to moments before we go live.

Argos



Over
10,000
prices frozen
or lowered

Helping you
live for less

Autumn/Winter 2011



Argos it.

Find it. Get it. Argos it.

www.argos.co.uk

So many ways to find it



In the book

- Over 2000 products to choose from
- A huge range of gifts for all the family
- Great in-store displays, some offering 10% extra value
- Exclusive brands like Clear, Huggies, get more, Argos and Schick



Online

- Over 12,000 home products and all the latest deals
- Check stock and reserve your products to avoid wait times
- Home products information, guides, and comparison tools to help you choose
- Before you buy, visit our customer reviews to find out what other customers think of our products



On your mobile

- Download our app for iPhone or browse our specially designed website for small screens
- Check stock and latest offers while on the move
- Over 12,000 products available to reserve at your local store



In-store

- Over 750 stores nationwide
- Our new Argos ChatPad shows you to check stock and get the best prices while on the move
- Some stores feature our new Quick Buy kiosks

Your Argos shopping experience starts here. Life just got a little easier. Argos it.



Peace of mind

If you change your mind, don't worry, most things are covered by our 30-day money-back guarantee.

4

here for a regular

Your Argos shopping experience starts here. Life just got a little easier. Argos it.

www.argos.co.uk

New at Argos

Facebook and Twitter

Keep up to date with the latest news, events, offers and exclusive fan competitions. Join us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/argos or follow us on Twitter @argos_online



Shop on the move

Check out the new Argos mobile site by scanning this code with the QR code reader on your smart phone.

QR codes transfer any files to download from your phone. For more details visit www.argos.co.uk

Alternatively visit www.argos.co.uk in your phone and visit to read more on how to use the code.



Argos TV

Our new home shopping channel is now on air, just tune in to Sky channel 812 or watch it online at argos.co.uk/tv

Shopping at the Argos Home Channel and your other choice straight to your TV. 24 hours a day, our watch and buy it's another great way to shop with Argos.



Exciting new ranges

Childing

Quality clothing and accessories for the whole family for your little ones, and our new great designs featuring all their favourite characters and our top quality books too like Daffodil and Elsie.



Books

Let's be honest, there's nothing like a good book. Discover the secrets of Star Wars, Tiger's adventures or read with Little Bear. You can get books to suit everyone in our award-winning range of over 1,000 titles. Book 20% off the RRP across the whole range so your prices will suit every pocket too.



Find it. Get it. Argos it.

5



Exercise: converting bullet points into long product entries

Find a typical directory-type catalog (perhaps for computer supplies, electrical equipment, or mail-order clothing). Study how the copy has been put together. It is likely to have good navigation, including category listings and page headings, with minimal copy for each product entry.

Select a double-page spread and analyze the sort of information you could add to make each product proposition more compelling to the reader. For example, if it is a camera catalog, what is it that makes each camera unique, and what would you, as a customer, need to know before you would be happy to purchase?

Do basic research on the Internet to gather a few facts, even if these are not strictly accurate (this is a hypothetical exercise after all!). Write new product entries for each item on the spread (it is important to do them all, as this will show you how difficult it is to avoid repetition). Explain features, highlight benefits, and suggest how the reader might make best use of each product.

When you've finished, compare your copy to the original. Consider how much time it's taken. Does the result justify the effort (and expense)? Could you deliver quality copy, assuming raw material was supplied by the client, for the entire catalog? In your opinion, what is the best way to present these items in a catalog, and what would work best for the reader and the client?



Round-up

Catalogs are retail environments controlled by the customer.

Space is always at a premium in catalogs.

Every catalog is a list or database of one sort or another.

The distribution method affects the format, which affects your approach to the copy.

The cover is your catalog's advertisement for itself.

A single product can say everything you need to about the entire catalog.

Organize and present the content in the most digestible way possible.

Pace yourself to help maintain a consistent voice throughout the catalog.

Use vocabulary precisely and sparingly.

Squeeze the little information you get very hard.

Develop a voice to which you feel the audience can relate directly.

Be clear about your specific objectives with each individual element.

Case Study: The Territory Ahead

The Territory Ahead (TTA) is a US private-label clothing and accessory catalog set up in the late 1980s. Mark Boston has been editorial director for the past three years. He explains the attitude and approach they take to writing for their audience, and how they tackle the complexities of their copywriting throughout the catalog.

Both personalities exist peacefully on the peninsula, as they do in our collection for spring. New colors and styles, grounded in our tradition of fine fabrics, details and construction. We hope you like what you see and that we hear from you soon.



©2007 TTA
THE TERRITORY AHEAD
Exceptional Clothing for Life's Advertisers

CROATIA
Istria - Spring 2007

From the Adriatic Coast to the interior of Istria, the journey is only a few dozen miles. But in Istria, the distance is more like night and day. The sun-bronched coast is Ferrari-sleek — hip, hot and happening. In the forest-carpeted interior, the pace is quieter and reflective of the true Croatian character. It's where savoring a delicious meal with wine and conversation is much more important than passing a taxi. Both personalities exist peacefully on the peninsula, as they do in our collection for spring. New colors and styles, grounded in our tradition of fine fabrics, details and construction. We hope you like what you see and that we hear from you soon.

Black & Tan Belt
This belt features elegant construction and a reputation with the better staying in your wardrobe with brown, tan and black. Q1, 100% cotton. In the Shop, Q1, \$69.99. Regular, \$99.99. **118817 \$84.99**

Required Taste Blazer
Dressed in English and easy lines, this blazer is made of a luxurious blend of silk and cotton. It's a rakish blend of luxurious (silk) and rugged (cotton) that's pigment dyed and sandwashed for great faded character. It's perfect for dressing up a pair of jeans or down a shirt and tie. **118802 \$149.99**

Glenn Green Cotton Blazer
Plus, our new blazer is made in Italy for the "Glen" by us. Designed for your needs, a blend of rugged and elegant. It's a rugged and elegant blazer. It's a rugged and elegant blazer. It's a rugged and elegant blazer. **118808 \$119.99**

Plumation Plaid Shirt
Offered in Regular and Tall Sizes. Designed for comfort and style, this shirt is made of a soft cotton. It's a rugged and elegant blazer. It's a rugged and elegant blazer. **118809 \$69.99**

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The Objective:

controlling the TTA tone of voice

Writing a large retail catalog involves many challenges, and maintaining consistency without losing freshness and originality takes a great deal of planning. My objective when I started was to control and develop the tone of voice for the catalog and for the company as a whole.

The Territory Ahead has a fun, conversational tone of voice, with lines packed with personality reflecting the mindset of the independent traveler, such as “Is it ever too soon to be comfortable? Hell, no. Crafted of a slip-on-easy all-cotton rib knit that guarantees warmth and promises silly and happy comfort from sunup to sundown.”

Although we sell our products through our print catalog, website, and retail stores, we decided to use the same style for our print and Web messages. The original tone of voice was established by the founder’s wife when the business began. At that time, we sold men’s products and the tone of voice was a little irreverent, poking fun at men in particular. This was a very different approach from that taken by most retailers, and resonated with customers. It proved popular and effective.

The Approach:

giving writers the freedom to express themselves

I have been a copywriter for years and years, but this is my first editorial role. I like it. I was always an in-house writer and I do miss the writing, although I make sure that I get to write some of the copy too.

I take the view that if I’m drawn to something as a customer, I’ll buy it, so I focus on how the copy will appeal to, or draw in, readers. I created a new approach to managing copy based on having one in-house editor who concentrates on women’s copy and another, our previous editorial director, focusing on men’s. All our writers are freelance; many have worked for us for quite a long time. They know what we want and they always deliver it to us.

We do have a tone-of-voice manual, but it isn’t too constraining—I want to see what writers can do when given some freedom, when they bring their experiences to the copy. We don’t want a cookie-cutter approach. We know that our customers are literate and intelligent. They don’t all travel, but they are interested. It’s a “road less traveled” kind of approach—a shared attitude to life.

We see the customer and our shared journey as the focal point of our brand. Everyone who writes for us knows our brand and understands what works

and doesn’t work. Every season we choose a different location and create an “editorial packet” full of details and anecdotes about the area. Our copywriters draw on the information to bring their copy to life, and this helps create some consistency without restraining the creative writing.

Our women’s products team includes two guys. Women do bring a different set of experiences when writing about clothes for women; they wear the same items and know what a woman looks for in them—but a few of our male writers also write successfully for women’s products. All of our writers have to pass a copy test, which includes about four products to write about. It’s strange, but many talented writers can’t do the style of writing we need. We don’t want it to be too catalog or traditional—for example, phrases such as “three reasons to buy.” We look to be more personable, engaging, and aspirational.

There are so many things to accomplish with the writing—it has to inform, engage, create interest, and sell the products—but I believe that it doesn’t really matter how you approach the writing, so long as you get under the skin of your audience. I love the Boden clothes catalog in the UK because it sounds like the first-person voice of the boss or a mate. Achieving this is harder than it looks, and I think it’s very important, especially for The Territory Ahead, not to talk down to readers. We aren’t afraid to be literary and use four-syllable words. We know if our readers don’t get it, they’re likely to look it up.

It’s important to keep a sense of variety. We ensure we get up close and examine merchandise on some pages, revealing textures and showing what we believe in. This will be followed by more heavily merchandised pages. There are two schools of thought on how much to write about products. I don’t subscribe to the idea that the more you put on the page, the more you sell, but others argue the point. Realities of economics mean that we have to fit more products onto the page in order to sell more.

The Result:

the copy is a major part of our brand expression

We get a lot of feedback. Just today I got a card from a customer saying he “enjoyed the story about the sausage in Germany” in our Fall catalog. Some don’t buy clothes, but they still like to read the copy and the way we write reflects this and is very much part of our brand identity. We design our own clothes and use our own voice. Our customers are nontraditional in the way they dress—that’s our niche, and unless the market changes we’ll stay the same.