

How To Recognise Bad Copywriting

Want to know how to lose customers? Want to know how to lose sales?
Want to know how to pour your advertising spend down the drain?

Well good for you!

Welcome to the "Bermuda Triangle of Bad Copywriting."

Ready to find out more? Then all at sea, sails at the ready, turn your Marketing Ship North and let's make our way to land mark number One.

The seductive Island of Zero-Benefits.

Ah, what a fearsome sight. The seductive Island of Zero-Benefits has brought many an advertising shipwreck. Inhabited by the femme-fatales of Agency rivalry, these Mermaid-like deceivers have the power of illusion. One by one they allure their victims with entertaining banter, puns, play-on-words and general poetic titillations.

Captains beware. Don't be lulled in by their enchanting sales-pitches and colourful PowerPoint presentations.

"Surely those clever words and flashy graphics will come to something," says Captain Marketing.

But alas, those slippery little slogans, conniving catchphrases and cryptic headlines don't actually say anything helpful to the customer.

No. Not one single benefit. Not one nice idea to make a possible customer think "ah, now that would be useful." No, not one.

And there's worse. Not only has your Agency not brought you in sales, they've just sunk all your golden treasure. Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear.

Beware! Land mark Number Two is not far away. Look to the South and you'll see the Rock of Vague Concepts.

The Rock of Vague Concepts

"There's something out there," says Hawkeye, watchman of the ship.

"What is it?" asks the Captain.

"I don't know," replies Hawkeye, squinting. "But it sure looks big."

“Can you see anything more?” says the Captain. “There must be something more specific.”

“Yes, sir. I see some words coming into view.”

“What kind of words, boy?”

“Erm. Quality. I see the words Quality.”

“And what else does do you see?”

“Nothing, sir. That’s it. Just the word Quality.”

“Is that all? There must be something more than that.”

“Hang on, sir - I also see the word Value. There’s definitely Value. And Service. I see the word Service. Oh no, sir! There are so many of them.”

“No! It can’t be!” cries the Captain, “It’s all so – so - so ... meaningless!”

“And Clichés! My God, sir. Clichés everywhere! We’re under attack! It’s too late. We’re being covered with them - Arghhhhhhhh!”

Wary voyager, take heed of lesson Number Two. Beware the Dark Rock of Vague concepts. They seem to mean something. But they don’t mean anything at all.

And finally, weary travellers, the third and possibly the most deceitful of them all...

The Great Whirlpool of Deceit

Desperate for new customers, the Captain of Marketing is tempted into the deadly Whirlpool of Deceit.

A few white lies here. A stretch of the truth there. It won’t do any harm, she thinks.

A new customer is seen on the horizon. They’re drawn in closer by signs of “AN AMAZING DEAL!!!*”

* expires 01/04/1987

“We got her!” cries the Captain.

But, oh dear, the joy doesn’t last for long. Not long at all. For when the mighty customer finds out the wool has been pulled over her eyes, she does three terrible things.

First, she feels disappointed. Then secondly, she feels mildly angry. And then worse - much, much worse. She then doesn't say anything at all. Not a word. She just leaves and never ever, ever comes back. Never.

And every good captain knows it costs on average 5 to 10 times more to attract a new customer than to retain a current one.

Seafarers ... you have been warned. Stay clear of the Bermuda Triangle of Bad Copywriting.