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write powerful ads and promotional pieces

Writing Copy

FOR

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Jonathan Kranz

Principal and chief copywriter,
Kranz Communications



Simple tips and
tricks that'll have
you writing
like a pro!

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Jonathan Kranz is an award-winning copywriter and principal of Kranz Communications (www.kranzcom.com), a marketing communications firm serving consumer and business-to-business clients in high-tech, healthcare, banking, insurance, education, financial services, and other industries. His client list includes 3Com, American Express, Aon Insurance, Blue Cross Blue Shield, Boston University School of Medicine, Candela, Dell, Home Service Store, IBM, iparty.com, Lesley University, Liberty Mutual, Matchmaker.com, NCR, Publishers Clearing House, Reader's Digest, Reed Elsevier, Spaulding & Slye Colliers, Surebridge, Terra Lycos, Time Warner, and USTrust, among many others.

In addition, Jonathan is a published author of short fiction (*Missouri Review* and *Green Mountains Review*, among others) and has been a repeated guest essayist on National Public Radio's *All Things Considered*. He has taught writing courses at Harvard University Extension School, Emerson College, and Northeastern University.

Jonathan lives in Melrose, Massachusetts, with his wife, Eileen; two daughters, Rebecca and Anastasia; and a vast collection of LP records.

Dedication

To Eileen: *O mondo, pieno di pazzi innamorati!*

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Introduction

You're about to get an inside look at one of the cheapest yet most powerful ways to motivate customer action: effective copywriting. In the thousands of marketing messages you're exposed to every day, you're surrounded by copy — the language of anonymous writers encouraging you to look, buy, shop, or respond. Yet, like the air, it's so pervasive that you rarely think about it — what it is or how it works.

While it serves the interests of the large, expensive advertising agencies to make you believe that copywriting is a mysterious process that only a worthy few can accomplish, the truth is, anyone with motivation, common sense, and a willingness to think clearly can write good copy. This book gives you everything you need to know to get the job done.

About This Book

The subject of this book is *copywriting*, the craft of writing advertisements and other marketing-related materials, not *copyrighting*, the rules and regulations pertaining to intellectual property rights. I can help you with the former; for the latter, you're at the mercy of a lawyer.

Most other books on copywriting assume that the reader wants to be a copywriter; that assumption doesn't apply here. I wrote this book for people who *don't* want to write, but who *need* to write or review copy as part of their job or business responsibilities. Although those interested in the profession will find help in these pages (and even career tips in Chapter 19), *Writing Copy For Dummies* is primarily for entrepreneurs, professionals, businesspeople, office workers, and managers who need a fast, fun, and easy-to-understand guide that takes you through every step of a successful copywriting project.

This book is explicitly designed so that you *don't* have to read it cover-to-cover (I won't object if you do, though!). Instead, you can skim the Table of Contents and go directly to those sections that apply to your immediate needs. That means if you're assigned to write a press release that was due yesterday, you can go right to the press release chapter (Chapter 12, by the way) and find everything you need right there, period.

Whether you sell products or services, are targeting consumers or other businesses, or are writing advertising or publicity pieces, this book gives you practical, time-tested methods for putting the power of the written word to work for you. Because, amazing as it may seem, you can turn the fundamental writing skills you learned in elementary school into one of your most effective tools for making sales, attracting new customers, building revenues (or raising funds), and

increasing profits. The secrets, and not-so-secrets, lie ahead.

Conventions Used in This Book

To help you navigate through this book, I use the following conventions:

- ✓ *Italic* is used for emphasis and to highlight new words or terms that are defined. A lot of copywriting examples are also set in italic.
- ✓ **Boldfaced** text is used to indicate keywords in bulleted lists and the action part of numbered steps.
- ✓ Monofont is used for Web addresses.

For simplicity's sake, I also stretched a few words to extend their meaning. Often when I refer to your "business," for example, I really mean any institution that you work for, including nonprofit or not-for-profit organizations such as schools, charities, or hospitals. Likewise, both "customers" and "prospects" refer to any persons you serve or would like to serve.

What You're Not to Read

If you're standing in a store right now weighing your decision to purchase this book, you may find it odd to

stumble on a section about what *not* to read. Heck, as a writer, I sure find it strange to tell readers that they can skip some (or any) of my golden prose.

In any case, you can skip anything marked with the Technical Stuff icon and not suffer any harm. It's interesting stuff, to be sure, but nothing you can't live without. Likewise, you can save anything you see in the sidebars (the shaded boxes throughout the book) for a rainy day when you have more time on your hands.

Foolish Assumptions

Given the source (myself), most of my assumptions tend to be foolish. Of these, only a few need concern you:

- ✓ You have at least a fair command of the English language and its basic rules of grammar and punctuation.
- ✓ You're interested in copywriting because you have some sort of business objective in mind (for example, sales, profits, or new customer acquisition), or, if your objectives are currently nebulous, you have the desire and ability to form business objectives and pursue them.
- ✓ You're responsible for writing copy for your business or organization, but you're intimidated by the copywriting process and would like guidance on how to create and fulfill great ideas.

How This Book Is Organized

Writing Copy For Dummies is organized into six parts, with each part serving as a cluster of like-minded chapters focused on a particular topic. And as you see in the Table of Contents, each chapter is itself further subdivided into subsections that make it easy to identify the issues that interest you.

Part I: Understanding Copywriting Basics

In Part I, I cover the ideas, issues, and challenges common to *all* copywriting projects, regardless of format or marketing purpose. Chapter 1, for instance, defines the territory: what copywriting is, who uses it, and how to select tactics for your needs. In Chapter 2, I dive into the fundamentals of copy itself, such as writing captivating headlines and compelling body copy. Chapter 3 is something special, covering a topic rarely addressed in books on copywriting: how to collect information *before* you write and then turn your research into a springboard for generating brilliant ideas.

Part II: Direct Response Writing That Makes the Sale

While good writing inspires respect, great writing provokes action. That's what Part II is all about: copywriting that, in itself, serves as the virtual salesperson that collects, leads, closes sales, acquires new customers, and expands current business relationships.

Chapter 4 gives you an overall perspective of direct response writing and its key topics, such as selecting lists, forming offers, and testing results. In Chapter 5, I tackle the Grand Old Man of direct response writing: the letter. Chapter 6 shows you how to write brochures that put your products and services in your customers' laps. In Chapter 7, you find a comprehensive review of the remaining direct mail elements, such as reply devices and lift notes. Chapter 8 reveals the power of alternative mailing formats, such as self-mailers, postcards, and catalogs. Finally, Chapter 9 helps you apply the time-tested techniques of direct mail to the more modern innovations embraced in e-mail.

Part III: Building Awareness of Your Business

In Part III, I explore those writing techniques that make your products and services unforgettable and irresistible. Chapter 10 provides an introduction to branding on the cheap. In Chapter 11, you get everything you need to know to write memorable advertisements. Chapter 12 gives you the inside scoop on media exposure, including a blow-by-blow guide to writing the press release. In Chapter 13, I present a secret weapon ignored by other copywriting books and overlooked by most of your competitors: writing articles for and about your business.

Part IV: Managing the Sales Support System

Even when copy doesn't have the starring role in your marketing strategy, it can go a long way to support your objectives. In Part IV, I show you how to write copy that helps strengthen your relationships with customers. Chapter 14 talks about the Web and offers a number of inside tips for writing Web site content that attracts and holds visitors. In Chapter 15, you discover fast, easy ways to write and manage *collateral*, the miscellaneous materials that support the sale. Chapter 16 addresses the special writing challenges you'll meet when your customer is not a consumer, but another business.

Part V: Looking at Special Copywriting Situations

This book needed a place to talk about important copywriting topics that just didn't fit neatly anywhere else: This is the place. Chapter 17 discusses the delicate art of raising money (and gathering support) for nonprofit enterprises such as charities and political causes. When bad things happen to good copy, you find consolation — and practical fix-it advice — in Chapter 18. In Chapter 19, I take a detour from my mission to help nonwriters by addressing the career options of writers who want to turn pro.