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***WRITING FOR THE WEB (ONLINE/INTERNET)***

Dosen

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**INTRODUCTION**

Ten years ago, many of the copywriting was 100% printed and zero percent was on the Internet. Today, 50 percent of copywriting is print and 50 percent is online (and maybe will be increasing more than 50% is online copywriting).

The conclusion? A working copywriter today is going to be doing a lot of writing for the Internet. Some of your assignments will focus on driving traffic to an existing Web site. Others will focus on creating Web copy, either adding pages to existing sites or creating brand-new sites.

**WHAT’S WORKING IN ONLINE MARKETING TODAY**

Here is one online marketing methodology that has been proven effective for many different types of businesses: Online marketing works best when you e-mail to people who already know you.

Therefore, successful online marketers build their “house file” or “e-list” (lists of prospects and their e-mail addresses) using the process outlined below, and then sell to those people via e-mail marketing. This is called the “Organic Model” or “Agora Model.”

**First**, the marketer builds a Web site that positions his company as an expert resource in a specific niche or industry. This is the client’s “base of operations” for his online marketing campaign.

This Web site should include a home page, an “About the Company” page, and a page with brief descriptions of the client’s products and services (each product or service description can link to a longer document giving more details on the item).



You should also have an “Articles Page” where you post articles you have written on your area of specialty, and where visitors can read and download these articles for free.

Write a short special report or white paper on your area of expertise, and make this available to people who visit your site. They can download it free, but in exchange, they have to register and give you their e-mail address (and any other information you want to capture).

Consider also offering a monthly online newsletter, or “e-zine.” People who visit your site can subscribe free if they register and give you their email address. You may want to give the visitor the option of checking a box that reads: “I give you and other companies you select permission to send me e-mail about products, services, news, and offers that may be of interest to me.”

The more “content” (useful information) on your site, the better. More people will be attracted to your site, and they will spend more time on it. They will also tell others about your site.

The model is to drive traffic to your site where you get them to sign up for either your free report or free e-zine. Once they register, you have their e-mail address and can now market to them via e-mail as often as you like at no extra cost.

The bulk of your online leads, sales, and profits will come from repeat e-mail marketing to this “house e-list” of prospects. Therefore your goal is to build a large e-list of qualified prospects as quickly and inexpensively as you can.

There are a number of online marketing options that can drive traffic to your site. These include: free publicity, e-mail marketing, banner advertising, co-registrations, affiliate marketing, search engine optimization, direct mail, and e-zine advertising.

The key to success is to try a lot of different tactics in small and inexpensive tests, throw out the ones that don’t work, and do more of the ones that are effective.

**COMMON ONLINE COPYWRITING ASSIGNMENTS**

There is often confusion as to what the particular “deliverables” are in online copywriting, what the terms mean, and how much copy is involved. For instance, what exactly do we mean by a “microsite”? How long is it? When should you use it?

Here are the most common online copywriting assignments I write for my clients, and the definition and scope of each:

1. A microsite, also known as a long-copy landing page, is a Web site designed to sell a product—such as a newsletter, e-book, or conference—directly. Copy length is equivalent to a 4- to 8-page sales letter.
2. A short-copy landing page is a simple landing page for a product or offer. Often used for white papers, software demos, and other inquiry fulfillment. Copy length is about the same as a magazine ad, with headline, a few paragraphs of descriptive product copy, and an online order form.
3. A transaction page is similar to a short-copy landing page, but with even less descriptive product copy. It is basically an online form the visitor can use to either order the product or request more information.
4. A long-copy e-mail is designed to sell a product directly by driving the recipient to a short-copy landing page or transaction page. Number of words is roughly the same as a 2- or 3-page sales letter.
5. A teaser e-mail is a short e-mail designed to drive the readers to a microsite or long-copy landing page where they can order the product. It’s the online equivalent of a ½- to 2-page sales letter.
6. A lead-generation e-mail is similar to the teaser e-mail, but the purpose is to drive readers to a landing page or transaction page where they can request a free white paper or other information.
7. An online e-mail conversion series is a series of follow-up e-mail messages, sent via autoresponder, designed to convert an inquiry into a sale.
8. An online ad is typically a 100-word classified ad to run in an e-zine and drive readers to a microsite or landing page. A banner ad is an HTML ad on a Web site.
9. A pop-under is a window that appears on a Web site when the visitor takes a certain action (typically trying to leave the site without ordering). It makes a special offer. Usually free, in exchange for the visitor giving his e-mail address.

**WRITING A CATALOG WEB SITE**

A catalog Web site sells many different items, and is the online equivalent of a catalog. Catalog Web sites have the following characteristics:

1. A large, searchable database of product photos and descriptions.
2. A shopping cart that enables you to buy products online.

The most famous example of a catalog Web site is Amazon.com, which originally sold books only and has branched into numerous other products including videos, music, tools, and electronics.

Another example of a successful catalog Web site is www.bluenile.com, an online marketer of jewelry. It’s a great example of how to set up an attractive Web site that sells merchandise online.

When you click on www.bluenile.com, you are immediately served a pop-up window with an irresistible offer: In return for entering your e-mail address, sex, age, zip code, and marital status, you are entered into a sweepstakes to win a diamond with an appraised value of $5,000.

There is a checkbox where you can opt in to receive offers and announcements by e-mail, but this is already checked off. So you’d have to uncheck it to get off their list.

The home page is cleanly and clearly laid out; in fact, it’s almost a little too stark. One could argue a jewelry site should be more elegant in design. But I don’t: The jewelry shopper is well served here. At the top is a banner with the Blue Nile logo and the tag line, “Education, Guidance, Diamonds, and Fine Jewelry.” It does an adequate job of positioning the site, but it doesn’t engage in a powerful way.

Copy under and to the right of the banner positions the site more effectively: “As the largest online retailer of certified diamonds and fine jewelry, we offer outstanding quality, selection, and value.” They make no mention of saving money or time by buying online versus going to a local jeweler.

From there, the home page has pictures of jewelry and product descriptions that are hyperlinked to pages showing and describing those products. Simple and basic, but sensible; I wouldn’t do it any other way.

There are also **three additional value-added links** on the home page:

1. “How to Choose a Diamond Ring” is a useful, informative guide to purchasing a diamond ring.
2. “Build Your Own Diamond Ring” lets you customize and then order a ring online with the stone and setting you select.
3. “Diamonds” searches for diamonds based on cut, color, clarity, carat weight, and price.

The mission of the Web site—to help the consumer shop for and buy a diamond or other jewelry online—is crystal clear. The entire site is designed to make the transaction as easy and painless as possible. Most of the hyperlinks on the home page go to specific products, so you can see what stones and jewelry are available. These pages are augmented by a useful but not overwhelming choice of helpful hints on buying diamonds, product searches, and interactive jewelry design.

The major personalization feature is “Build Your Own Diamond Ring,” which allows the consumer to mix and match stones and settings to

personal preference, rather than buy a ring “off the shelf.” There’s not much other personalization, nor is it needed. The Web site allows you to enter your e-mail address to receive reminders of major holidays, but it does not allow you to enter other reminder dates, such as your anniversary or your mother’s birthday. It’s fun and easy to shop for jewelry on Blue Nile. You can easily find what you are looking for, the shopping cart works well, and there are always links that let you drill down for more product detail and consumer information, whether it’s a close-up photograph of a ring or a schematic diagram showing how a certain setting holds the stone in place. All told, Blue Nile is a case in point that functional, useful copy and design can help create an accessible and successful Web site.

**WRITING A WEB SITE USING THE WATERFRONT MODEL**

The catalog Web site is a standard model of e-commerce proven to be profitable. Another is the “Waterfront Model.” Waterfront Media has developed a series of profitable Web sites, one of which is Denise Austin’s fitness and health site, www.deniseaustin.com. All of these sites are based around what I call the “Waterfront Model,” a business model for e commerce that Waterfront has pioneered and perfected. Let’s look at the model, using Austin’s site as the example. In the Waterfront Model, the home page is what I call “tabloid-style”: lots of interesting tips, items, and factoids. But prominent on the page is a section with an offer—in Austin’s case, “Get your complete online fitness plan!”—with a large START HERE button.

The primary goal of the site is to get you to click on START HERE. When you do, you are offered some sort of an evaluation of your problem—as well as a plan or solution—in return for filling in the online questionnaire. This is naturally a health and fitness evaluation, since Austin is a fitness guru. The evaluation centers on weight loss, although it touches on other topics, such as exercise. You click through a few screens, answering simple questions and giving some personal information, like how much you weigh now and your target weight.

After completing the assessment, you are offered the solution, which is typically customized (or seemingly customized) content delivered online. This is not a free offer, but the first step in converting you into a customer. Since this is the “front-end” (first) sale, cost is typically low: just a few dollars a week or month. Once you buy, you get e-mails offering you add-on products, both Austin’s and related items.

The beauty of the Waterfront Model and all Web sites built using it, is that the action to be taken is loud and clear: Click on the button labeled START HERE! And the core of the Waterfront Model is innovative use of an interactive self-assessment questionnaire. The visitor must complete the questionnaire before she is offered the fitness plan, which she has to pay for. This creates the perception that the site is delivering personalized advice, not boilerplate content. Not only does the site invite you to fill out a personal questionnaire, it won’t offer you any sort of fitness plan until you do. In this way, the site actually forces you to personalize the content, which makes the advice seem more genuine. After all, how can you help me improve my health without asking personal questions (as www.deniseaustin.com does) about my health, exercise, diet, height, weight, etc.?

The most prominent involvement devices in Austin’s site are several free online newsletters addressing various areas of health and fitness. There is also an “Ask Denise” page where you can post questions and have Denise answer them for you. To make the site even more interactive, I could see adding some forums or discussion groups where visitors can get information and support on relevant topics including weight loss, diet, exercise, and cardiac fitness.

The site is sensibly organized into quadrants and sections. A horizontal bar at the top of the home page gives us clearly labeled, one-click hyperlink access to the major site sections. In the upper right quadrant of the home page, we have the cornerstone of the Waterfront Model, START HERE. There’s no mistaking that the site wants you to do this, by (a) offering a fitness plan and (b) promising a number of bulleted benefits (e.g., “shed 1–2 inches from your waist”).

In the upper left quadrant, you gain access to “Ask Denise,” a Q&A section where Denise Austin answers your fitness and exercise questions. In the lower left quadrant, you get a mix of free content: success stories, news (“What’s doing with Denise?”), and daily tips.

In the lower right quadrant, you are given a window where you can buy some of Denise’s new videos and related fitness products online. The primary graphics are various images of toned, fit, slim, attractive Denise Austin in exercise clothes, clearly communicating that (a) the site offers help with fitness and exercise, and (b) the methods used obviously achieve the results desired (at least for Denise).

Copy on the site indicates that it is aimed at women (for instance, it talks about reducing your dress size). If men were an equal target, I could see using more photographs of Denise and other fitness competitors in slightly more revealing exercise outfits. Not only does sex sell, but such outfits clearly show the tone and fitness achieved.

Another example of a Web site built around the Waterfront Model is www.ediets.com, a diet, nutrition, and fitness site. On February 2004, when clicked onto the www.ediets.com home page, the main graphic featured a picture of Victoria Principal with some article titles, and it seemed to deliberately resemble the front cover of a women’s magazine—in particular, Ladies’ Home Journal. So right away, as a male, I could not relate to the home page. Maybe eDiets is mainly targeting women. But half of the 100 million or so males in America are overweight, too.

The home page is, again, “tabloid style”—lots of interesting little items to choose from. Unfortunately, with a tabloid-style home page, there’s no single point of focus, and no unifying positioning copy to tie it all together or define the brand of the site.

Although the large magazine cover graphic catches the eye, I was drawn to an interactive box that said “Lose 20 Pounds by March 25.” You enter your height, weight, and age—and then click through a series of screens asking you more questions, so that eDiets can design a customized weight-loss plan for you, for which they charge $11.96 a month. Along the way, you are offered a number of free e-zine subscriptions and information on advertised products, which makes it a little bit confusing and overwhelming.

The request for $11.96 a month at the end of the process came as a surprise; I somehow thought everything would be free. The reason it surprised me was that there is no “sell” copy preceding the questioning process.

So being asked for money came as a bit of a shock. And I didn’t buy. That’s just my personal reaction; I have no idea what the actual conversion rate is.

Interestingly, when I went to the diet-plan questionnaire to run through it again, I was immediately served a page that said, “Welcome back, Bob. We’ve saved all your information. Click here to view it now. Click here for a special offer for return visitors!”

When clicked on the special offer for return visitors, however, it was the same $11.96 a month, which had been offered earlier. It didn’t see what was special or different about it.

**WRITING A LONG-COPY LANDING PAGE**

Depending on who’s counting, there are at least 160 paid-subscription financial newsletters published in North America. The most popular focus on stock recommendations, but there are others covering everything from options and futures to precious metals and mutual funds.

There are also a few large—and numerous small—Web-based investment advisory services, many of which sell stock and mutual fund recommendations in a variety of online and offline formats.

Online, virtually all of these newsletters are sold with long-copy landing pages. A long-copy landing page is a Web site dedicated to selling a single product: the newsletter. Also known as a microsite, the long-copy Web site is the equivalent of a long sales letter (4 to 8 pages) posted on the Web.

Some marketers present their microsites in segments or pages. After reading one page of the letter, you must click to read the next page. The danger is that every time you ask readers to click to the next page without buying, some drop off. Most marketers today run their landing pages as one (or at the most two) long continuous pages, so the prospect can read by scrolling rather than clicking.

Among these financial newsletter editors, Louis Rukeyser is perhaps the one most familiar to the general public—largely because of his TV show. He publishes two newsletters: Louis Rukeyser’s Wall Street and Louis Rukeyser’s Mutual Funds, the latter, as its name indicates, focused solely on mutual funds. Let’s take a look at this online promotion as an example of how to write a successful long-copy landing page.

The landing page carries Mr. Rukeyser’s byline directly under the headline. That’s a good strategy for two reasons. First, it creates the impression that you are reading an article rather than a promotion. And second, it gets Mr. Rukeyser’s famous name right up front, where it should be. Promoting the famous Rukeyser brand is also accomplished by placing the newsletter masthead above the headline (remember, Rukeyser’s name is prominent in the newsletter title) along with Mr. Rukeyser’s photo and signature—these images provide graphic reinforcement of the brand.

The headline itself, “Here’s how to put the best fund managers in the country to work for you,” is a sensible statement and promise. But it could be much more powerful.

Part of the problem is that it’s not specific. What does “best” mean? Are these the fund managers with the best performance today? This year? The past five years? The past ten years?

Also, what’s the benefit of putting the best fund managers in the country to work for me? If it’s to help me outperform the broad market, show me, right in the headline, how they did it—for instance, “How the top 10 fund managers helped my readers turn $100,000 into $398,450 in just 10 years.”

The lead is specific and engaging, telling you how you would have turned $10,000 into $194,943 within twenty years by investing in a fund with a great manager, but would have turned $10,000 into $836 by investing in a fund with a lousy manager.

The rest of this long-copy landing page is similarly strong. It does a great job of explaining the “big idea” or system behind the newsletter, which is to increase mutual fund profits by finding the best-performing fund managers and revealing their favorite stock picks. (The reader can either buy those funds or the individual stocks.)

When discussing track record, the copy focuses not on the newsletter’s performance but on the track records of the fund managers Rukeyser profiles, which are indeed impressive.

The one flaw is that there’s not enough promise, early in the copy, of future benefit. I know these fund managers have done great, but they’ve already been covered in the newsletter. If I subscribe today, what will I learn that will help me make more money today and tomorrow?

The easiest way to remedy this is to create a premium with the best current stock or mutual fund picks, and offer that early in the copy—perhaps even in the lead.

The various links throughout the Rukeyser landing page promise a “100% risk-free trial” to the newsletter when you click on the link. Clicking brings you to a simple, easy-to-follow order page where you can sign up for that trial.

The one flaw—and it’s a big one—is that the offer of a “100% risk-free trial” is not repeated or explained on the order page. (It is explained in the closing text of the right-hand column, but if you click on a link before that and go to the order page, you won’t see it.)

The primary order option is to click on a link and go to the order page where you can subscribe online. Other contact information—an address, toll-free phone number, fax number, and e-mail for customer service—appear at the end of both the landing page and the order page. You get two free special reports when you sign up for one year, and four free reports when you subscribe for two years, and this is clearly indicated on the landing page and the order page.

You also get a nice discount off the regular rate. This is made clear on the landing page, but not on the order page, which only gives the price— but does not indicate that it’s a discount off the regular rate. When I clicked away from the Rukeyser site, I was not served a pop-up window offering me a bribe (e.g., a free e-newsletter or special report) in exchange for my e-mail address. This is a huge tactical error for any landing page. Why? Because if you get the visitor’s e-mail address before he leaves without ordering, you can serve him a series of follow-up e-mails via autoresponder attempting to convert him to a trial subscription. And, you’ve added another valuable name to your house e-list. Without his e mail address, you have lost the opportunity for follow up, significantly reducing your conversion rate.

Several standard devices have been used to make this long-copy newsletter promotion work on the Web. One is the use of a two-column format, with a column running along the right margin used to get additional sales points across. The other is the placement of links to the order page early and periodically throughout the long copy, rather than waiting to the end to give the link.

Some experts say that placing a link to the order page too early in the copy can depress response. Reason: People click through to the order page before they are sold, and then click away without ordering. On the other hand, some experts say that placing links to the order page early and often throughout long-copy landing pages increases the conversion rate, and that’s been my personal experience in most instances. So this is something you may want to test.