

Open to persuasion

The Roberts At Sea Medicine Show

TARGET GROUPS

| BENEFITS | 1. Local residents who are interested in the show | 2. Local business owners who are interested in the show | 3. Local schools who are interested in the show | 4. Local churches who are interested in the show | 5. Local community groups who are interested in the show |
|--------------------------------------|---|---|---|--|--|
| Have fun and enjoy yourself | | X | X | (X) | (X) |
| Find out more about the show | X | | | X | X |
| Lots of choices to enjoy in the show | X | | (X) | X | X |
| Learn more about the show | X | (X) | X | | X |
| Enjoy the show with the kids | (X) | X | | | |
| Enjoy the show with the family | X | (X) | X | | X |
| Use it as a marketing tool | | | X | X | X |

The words we use to describe the events we put on are crucial. If you are marketing on a shoestring they are your most important marketing tool. Whether we are writing copy or talking face-to-face with potential attendees, we need to use words that persuade. If we don't, then we waste precious resources on marketing communications that simply won't work.

Words don't cost money. But they do cost time and that's often just as precious. So how can we make deciding what to say less time-consuming (and less painful)?

Know what you are talking about

You can't be persuasive if you don't feel confident you know what you are talking about. The participants in the AMA's recent Do the Write Thing copywriting seminars pinned down the problem nicely: they get copy from their curators/artistic directors/choreographers/visiting companies that even they don't understand. How can they hope to turn it into something that communicates effectively with their audiences? Together we came up with some solutions.

Don't let your curator/artistic director/choreographer pick up a pen. Talk to them. Ask leading questions. Engage their enthusiasm rather than their intellect. Don't scribble – concentrate on asking the right questions. Instead, take a voice recorder, tape the conversation then transcribe what they say. You'll be surprised how persuasive it sounds. All you have to do is pick out the gems and polish them.

Most seminar participants seemed reluctant to ask touring companies the obvious questions. Don't be afraid. You won't be the only person who doesn't know what a dobro and a medicine show are, or can't place Appalachian country music in the spectrum of contemporary popular culture. If you ask enough questions you'll find out the show sounds like *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*.

Know who you are talking to

Copywriting is much easier if you have a clear image of who you are talking to fixed in your head. If you try to talk to several very different kinds of people all at once, you end up not communicating effectively with any of them (yes, even in your season brochure). Decide exactly who each communication is aimed at. What are they like? What are they interested in? What do they worry about? What information do they need to make a decision? What do you and your organisation have in common with them? What tone of voice and vocabulary

would reflect this common ground? Create a copy brief for yourself by jotting down the answers to these questions and you'll find the inspiration to write comes much quicker.

Do the thinking once

If you spend half an hour thinking early on, you never have to do that thinking again (and again). I use a matrix like the one above to summarise my thinking about an event and use it as a prompt every time I have to talk or write about it.

I've written my target markets in the spaces along the top of the square and the benefits the show has to offer down the side. For each target group or customer, I've put a cross against the three or four benefits I think are most important to them. I've then put a circle around the one that is the most important. There should be no more than four crosses in each column. A framework helps you to structure your copy quickly. This one works for me.

Make a promise:

1. Get the attention of the reader by using a headline.
2. Make a promise using the benefit you want to emphasise most.
3. Show that you can deliver your promise by backing it up with facts.
4. Push for action – tell the reader what they should do to benefit from your promise.

If you've completed a matrix, you've done most of the work already. Write about the benefit you circled as your headline and first paragraph. Then write about the other benefits you put crosses against. This way, you don't have to think about what to write, but can concentrate on being creative.

Don't leave it until the last minute

No-one can write good copy staring a deadline in the face. Start early. Spend a little time creating your matrix and jotting down some briefing notes. Now let your subconscious do some of the work by mulling things over in odd idle moments. Have a go at a first draft. Stop. Put it away and don't look at it again for a couple of days. Then come back and tidy it up.

Now show it to a friend, and then a colleague, and incorporate any useful feedback. Show it to someone from your target group. What does it say to them? What do they remember when they've read it? ■

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