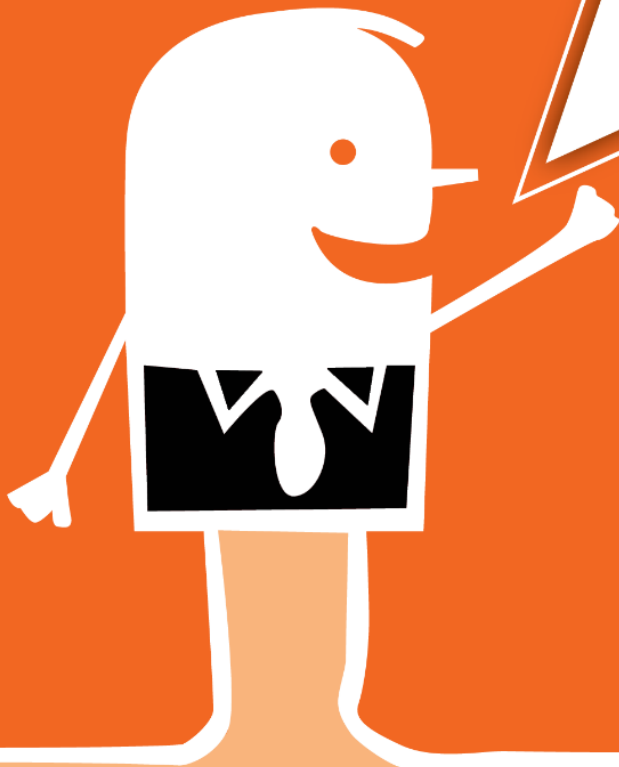


# COPY HACKERS

**Where Stellar  
Messages  
Come From**



**BOOK 1**

By Joanna **Wiebe**

Conversion copywriter, messaging strategist and co-founder of Copy Hackers & Disco

**SECOND EDITION** *Updated with new examples for 2014*

## WHAT YOU WILL BE ABLE TO DO BY THE TIME YOU'RE DONE THIS EBOOK

- ✓ Write faster by doing more research up-front
- ✓ Better know your customer... and your visitor... and your product... and...
- ✓ Work up the courage to conduct a few customer interviews
- ✓ Collect voice-of-customer feedback – even if you don't have any customers yet
- ✓ Organize your messages like a pro copywriter would
- ✓ Hone your ear for “great messages”
- ✓ Find messages that are as sticky as Think Different
- ✓ Rethink all the junk in your head about *selling products* with copy
- ✓ Squeeze more juice outta testimonials
- ✓ Be smarter than your competition

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### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Joanna Wiebe is the original conversion copywriter and a messaging strategist specializing in persuasive writing that turns visitors into happy, repeat customers. Since 2003, she has been writing, editing & proofreading online and offline copy and designing interactions for tech companies as well as startups. She also consults and teaches writing for professionals. She holds an MA in Communications & Technology with specialization in persuasion in ecommerce environments.

The co-founder of Disco Surveys, Joanna lives with her hub-bub in Victoria, British Columbia.

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**Website:** copyhackers.com

# 1.

## GET TO KNOW YOUR CUSTOMER BEFORE YOU WRITE A WORD

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You're not selling a product.

You're not selling a service.

You're not selling a solution. An app. A pair of shoes. A device. A SaaS plan. An upgrade.

Here's the only thing you're selling, no matter what business you're in and what you ship:  
**you're selling your prospects a better version of themselves.**

When you do *that* effectively, you sell better. Your conversion rate increases. People share stories about you and their experiences with your solution. Life gets easier. For everyone.

But in order to sell your prospects a better, happier version of themselves, you need to put down your pen, step away from your keyboard, stop actively thinking about your solution... and **get to know the Helsinki outta your visitors, customers and prospects.**

In the first edition of this book, we took a little while to get to this point. But it is, in fact, your thesis as a copy hacker. Your job is not to write copy. Your job is to know your visitors, customers and prospects so well, you understand the situation they're in right now, where they'd like to be, and exactly how your solution can and will get them to their ideal self. Your job is, from that point, to sell your prospect a better version of himself or herself.

I'll teach you how to do that.

## YOUR BEST MESSAGES DON'T COME FROM INSIDE YOUR HEAD

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The reason I believe every startup founder can write their own copy is because the best-converting copy doesn't actually come from a copywriter. Or a so-called wordsmith. Or a content creator. You don't need to be a copywriter to write a very solid draft of your web or email copy.

That's because, as you're going to see throughout this ebook, the best messages – the ones that help you sell your prospects a better version of themselves – come from the people who have bought or are likely to buy your solution.

Take the raw statements they share.

And use them verbatim.

Or tweak them using the techniques you'll learn in the Copy Hackers ebooks.

When you get inside your prospect's head by using his/her words, you get much closer to understanding what their "better version" of themselves looks like. When you stay in your own head, you only know what happiness means to you. It might be different for them. So get out of your head – and start maniacally stalking, in the most legal ways, your prospects.

## FIRST, WHO'S YOUR TARGET MARKET (OR MARKET SEGMENT)?

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Before you can start studying what your prospects have to say, you might want to figure out who they are in the first place.

Who's your target market? Do you know? How *sure* are you?

When building a photo-sharing solution, you may think your target market is the early adopter tech group out there, the ones who'll up-vote your "We Just Launched" blog posts on Hacker News. And you may be right. So you may think you should target your messages at tech geeks...

But how long will that market *use* your site?

How likely will they be to refer your site to influential people or to the masses?

**People who won't derive enough value to talk about your product after using it are *not* your target audience.** Let them sign up if they want to. But don't work at acquiring them. It's not worth it. They'll barely use your solution; they'll never tell anyone about it; and they'll make you work yer butt off for the sheer pleasure of serving them. Which sucks.

Now ask yourself, and be hard on yourself: **Do I really know who my target customer is?**

With a little research, you may find that the prevailing users of your photo-sharing site will be teenage girls, teenage “EMO” boys, new moms, retired women. Will the messages that work on a tech-geek group work on those groups? Unlikely. What matters to those groups? TBD. Once you figure out your primary target market(s), you can delve deeper to find out the details that flesh out these faceless, nameless “markets”.

How can you do this research, you ask?

Great question. That question brings us to the gold of this book, the gold in any copy hacker’s treasure chest, the gold that is research and discovery.

- **If you have an email list (i.e., for lead gen, for pre-launch signups), send them a short survey requesting info.** Ask them about themselves – and ask them what interests them in your service. HINT: If you actually ask people to please do you a favor – use the word “favor” – your response rates can increase. Adding “please” can only help. I’ve seen it. Test it to prove me right.
- **Go out there and TALK to people.** I’m amazed by how frequently startups with zilch dollars think they need to hire a consulting firm to hold a focus group and generate some useless report. Focus groups are, like, 8 people. Can you not go to a coffee shop and annoy 8 people? Hell, you could give ‘em all \$25 gift cards for their time and still save tons o’ cash vs. actually holding a focus group. Plus, you’ll get to have real conversations – and conversations stick much better than a bunch of data in some report. Oh, and let’s not forget that focus groups often lead to the very ugly “groupthink”, where a dominant personality in the group can sway others to agree with her... leaving you with skewed, useless data. Blech. Not good.
- **Stay in your office and TALK to people.** Okay, to be honest, I don’t like going out and talking to people. I do it a lot, but rarely by choice. I’d much rather converse with people online, from the comfort of my own desk. So, if you’re like me, get involved in forums. That does NOT mean spamming forums – showing up, splashing news about your pending launch, and then high-tailing it. That means listening to what your potential customers are talking about, and engaging them when/if it will be mutually beneficial.

You also need to figure out the demographic details for your target markets or segments. Knowing the vital statistics for your markets, where they live and more can help you break your markets into segments. And knowing target *segments* can really help you shape your language – so you can get specific (which is better than generic).

You'll want to learn their:

- Age
- Gender
- Marital status
- Number of children
- Education
- Annual income
- Disposable income / budgets
- Favorite websites
- Favorite pastimes
- Device usage

### TRY DISCO

We created Disco conversion surveys to help startups collect essential demographic data. And because traditional pop-up surveys can see low response rates, Disco surveys are incentivized. Awesome side effect: Disco often spikes sales.

Check out [trydisco.com](https://trydisco.com)

You're not just learning this stuff so you can shove it into a report and dust your hands of it. We're not MBAs, after all.

We're copy hackers. We're self-funded startup founders and marketers that need ROI on everything we spend our precious time on. So what can you do with demographic data? How can that help you craft your message?

Well, married men over the age of 35 with 2 children and a Master's degree may be made 'happy' by something different from what would make retired divorcees with grown children and a dependency on their RSP / 401K happy. Both could want a boat. But the people in that boat and the duration of trips taken with that boat will be quite different. You wouldn't want to treat these two groups the same in your web copy or art.

## NEXT, NARROW YOUR MARKET INTO MANAGEABLE SEGMENTS

Unless you're planning to disrupt a major existing business – like Expedia or the MLS – you may not want to try to market to a wide range of people. Instead, you'll want to segment your market to determine whom to focus your energy on.

That is, **you want to choose the segment that will visit your site with the most frequency and be most likely to compensate you in some way for your service** – whether that compensation is actual *money* paid to you, referrals sent your way, or new users brought into your fold.

These segments are the people you are writing copy for.

These segments are the people who are most likely to become your customers.

They may not be glamorous and they may not be rich. But if they have the money to spend on your product and the network of friends to refer to your service, then they are the new cornerstone of your business.

Know them like your spouse. No, *better*.

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### EXAMPLE: MESSAGING FOR MOMS

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If you're writing copy for your photo-sharing site, and you know your visitors are primarily married young stay-at-home moms without post-secondary education, under \$55K in annual household income, \$20K in credit-card debt, and 0.8 devices per member of the household, you'll probably steer your messages towards how *affordable* your solution is. And probably steer them away from *ease*, knowing that this market is at ease with technology in general.

And if you know these young moms generally have smart phones with apps to keep their kids busy in the back of the Dodge Caravan while they drive to and from the grocery store because they only hire a babysitter on date night or Girls' Night Out, then you might offer a free or low-cost game-style app to win their loyalty. You might even put a link to download that app front-and-center on your home page.

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### EXAMPLE: MESSAGES FOR CAREER-ORIENTED WOMEN

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On the other hand, if you learned that your primary target segment was middle-aged career-oriented women with low consumer debt, high household income, and a propensity toward visiting Oprah.com and lending on Kiva, would you talk about how affordable your solution is? Not if you want results. In fact, you might adjust your pricing – and messaging – strategy to play into the idea that *high prices equal better solutions* for this group.

Do you see how knowing your market will shape your primary messages and even your positioning as a brand? This is not to be glossed over. It *will* impact your conversion rate.

**There are 100s of different messages out there for this reason: each segment has values and motivations that only a few messages will meet.**

You can't reach your hand into the grab bag of messages and use whatever you pull out.

You need to target *specifically*.

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### IT'S HARD TO BE YOUR BEST SELF... IF YOU'RE IN PAIN...

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At a high level, there are 2 sides to crafting a message:





1. Targeting pain
2. Reflecting motivation, including a desire to derive value

Your product needs to neutralize or eradicate a critical pain for your market or market segment... or to pinpoint one of their key motivations.

**Let's start with pain.** Find out what the pains are that your target customer experiences and that you can solve. Here are some ways you can start to uncover pains:

- Ask yourself, *what keeps my customers up at night?*
- Audit your competitors' sites to see what pain points they hit on
- Test PPC ads with certain pain points in them to see which get clicked most often
- Monitor people in your ideal customer segment on Twitter and/or in their blogs to see what pains they mention

Once you know the pains your customers feel, you can start thinking through how your solution addresses or eradicates those pains. And use that *very useful* information in your copywriting.

#### **Research: Interview to Find Pain Points**

In *Pain Killer Marketing* (2008), Chris Stielhl and Henry DeVries show that 12 to 15 one-on-one interviews will generate about 80% of all possible pain points for your segment. That's the same amount as 7 focus groups with up to 12 participants in each. One-on-one interviews can save you thousands of dollars – with the same high quality of results.

**Now on to the topic of motivation**, which is what great marketing campaigns remind people of and further instill in people. "Motivation" is the driving force behind the actions we take. When a user comes to your site, they are motivated to do so – motivated by forces that live outside the virtual walls of your virtual store.

You cannot create motivation on your site.

But you can – and must! – reflect your visitors' primary motivation in the copy on your site. At least on your home page. But also across the primary pages in your user flow.

Motivations run deep and are the sort of insights into a person that only their closest friends would talk about. But they're real for all of us. You won't necessarily describe motivation in your copy; rather, you'll want to *reflect* your market's motivations, like:

- Getting incredible results with very little effort
- Reclaiming their childhood innocence
- Feeling connected to other people
- Keeping up with the Joneses
- Hosting the perfect family Christmas
- Attracting the person everyone else would want
- *Being* the person everyone else would want
- Never feeling hungry again
- Finally getting respect from their father or mother
- Becoming the ultimate lover
- Guaranteeing their family's financial well-being
- Protecting their loved ones from predators, including disease and bullies
- Loving what they see when they look in the mirror
- Loving themselves, period

Let me better explain motivation on the web with an example. Meet Teresa. She's 37 years old, married and 35 pounds overweight. Summer's coming. She's crazy-busy with work and driving her kids around. She'd love a magic pill to lose weight. That doesn't exist. So she goes to JennyCraig.com.

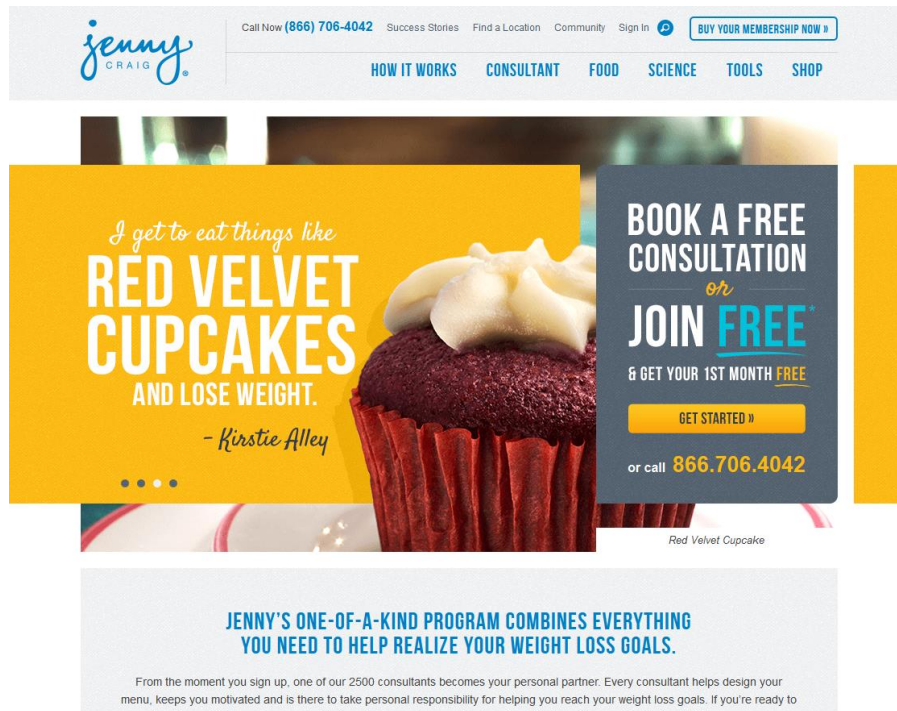
If JennyCraig.com were a site filled with info on losing weight, you'd think Teresa would be in her glory and sign up immediately.

**But the problem with an info-dump is that Teresa's motivation is not to *learn*.**



Teresa's real motivations are to lose weight in order to prove herself against the skinny girl next door, to prove to her husband that she's desirable, to earn her cranky mother's respect and to love what she sees when she looks in the dressing room mirror. (Don't get me started on body issues. I don't necessarily see eye-to-eye with "Teresa.") She also wants to get these results with very little effort. And she wants to be given permission to love herself without changing who she is or what she does.

She skips through all those deep motivations because they're hard to confess. Instead, she tells herself that she just wants a website with info about losing weight. *Suuure* she does. The smart copy hacker knows that, in addition to giving Teresa great resources – which a million sites, books and blogs do – you need to tap into her real motivations.



It's not about becoming a size zero. Or learning everything under the sun about weightloss.

Teresa wants to make the girl next door jealous of her and make her husband pay her compliments... without doing any work... and without hating herself along the way.

Her pain is the need to shed pounds.

Her motivation is much deeper and broader.

Write with both in mind. And, in doing so, get closer to helping your prospect connect your solution with a better, happier version of herself.

## MOTIVATION IS MARKETING

As I mentioned, you cannot create motivation on your site. You can only reflect the existing motivations of your users – and, when you're really good, build on those motivations.

At its core, "motivation" is created by marketing, PR, family, friends, colleagues and the big ol' connected world we live in.

Society and external forces shape most of our internal motivations.

That doesn't mean that you, as a startup with limited resources, have to go out and do the marketing and PR yourself. Not at all. **If you're competing with an existing solution that is**

**already heavily marketing itself, you can piggyback off the motivation that those marketers are creating.**

For example, let's suppose you've created a personal finance management tool. Motivation already exists for such a solution. Big companies like Intuit and major banks have done the heavy lifting of convincing people that they need to manage their money. Television shows like *Til Debt Do Us Part* have added to that motivation. The memory of the 2008 meltdown and continued economic challenges reinforce that it's a good thing to watch your finances.

Your visitors are primed. They have a pain; they know that solutions exist.

You don't have to motivate them any more than they already are.

All you have to do is remind people why they need *your* solution.

So, to continue the personal finance management example, you might write a callout below your hero section that reads like any of the following:

*Americans who use software to manage their money sleep better at night.*

*Find out where you're leaking cash so you can save more money & invest in your future.*

*Categorize your expenses! Over 30% of Americans spend \$1400 annually on coffee.*

*Money problems are the #1 reason for divorce in North America.*

(NOTE: When it comes to claims, make sure you have support for those claims. That could be as simple as a link to the Newsweek article where the research was first published.)

If you know the pain you're solving for your customers, you can begin to craft copy that speaks to the very thing that motivated them to go to your site in the first place. This copy will not necessarily convert each and every visitor, but it should at least:

- ✓ Confirm that your solution is what they thought it was
- ✓ Remind them that they need a solution like yours if they want to solve their problem
- ✓ Help them stay on the page longer... and consider your offering
- ✓ Get them to begin nodding along with what you're saying
- ✓ Move them to the next part of the experience, where you can work to convert them

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## WHAT MOTIVATION IS NOT

Motivation is not a discount. It's not a limited-time offer. Although your customers may be price-sensitive and motivated to save wherever they can, their motivation runs deeper than

that. If you want to write quality copy that keeps new visitors on your site longer, you need to get to the core of visitor motivation – the core of what your solution actually solves.

Motivation is not your value proposition, either. Your value proposition speaks to the unique, highly desirable solution you offer. Motivation is deeper than that.

## EXAMPLES OF SITES THAT CATER WELL TO ONE MARKET OR MARKET SEGMENT

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The following includes 2 examples of well-known websites that clearly understand their target market segments and have written & designed their sites to speak to those markets.



**SITE:** PointAbout.com

**PRIMARY MARKET:** B2C in E-commerce, motivated to make money.

**WHY IT'S GREAT:** Appmakr/PointAbout lets companies make their own apps so they can make money. The copy speaks only to that and is supported by meaningful design.



**SITE:** WildFireApp.com (WildFire)

**PRIMARY MARKET:** Marketers in social media, motivated to build their followings in order to make money.

**WHY IT'S GREAT:** Making no bones about it, the copy on this page says exactly what the visitor wants to hear and supports that with easily identifiable social logos.

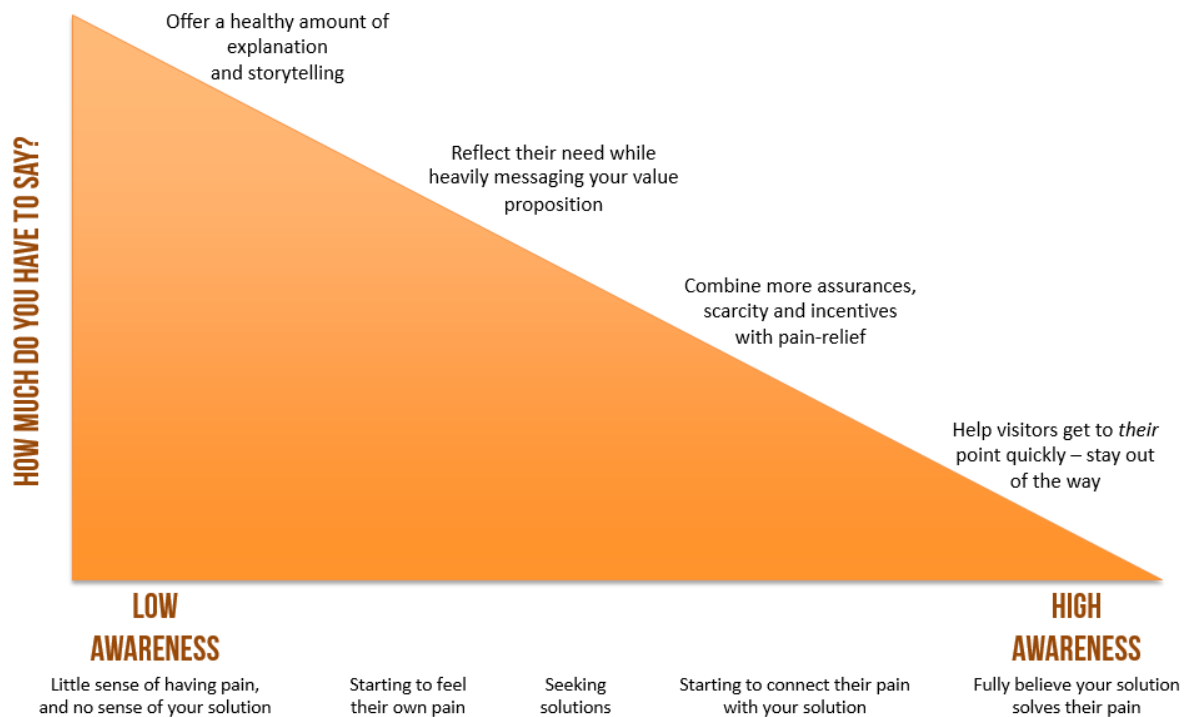
## HOW AWARE IS YOUR MARKET SEGMENT?

A phrase made popular by master copywriter (the late, great) Gene Schwartz, “state of awareness” is the extent to which the people arriving on your site and reading your copy are aware of:

- Their own pain or desire
- The availability of *a* solution for that pain or satisfier for that desire
- The availability of *your* solution as the best for that pain

Someone may know your brand name, but they may not yet feel the pain your solution solves. Someone may know they have a pain and that there are solutions for that pain, but they may not know about your brand or how your product in particular helps.

Understanding how aware your visitors are of their need for your solution can help you better understand not only what’s motivating them... but also how much you need to say to convince them to choose you.



At the low end of the awareness spectrum, you've got to do a lot of work to help your prospects figure out everything, from the reality of the pains they're experiencing all the way through to who you are, why they should care, and what you can do to dramatically improve their lives.

Think of solutions like Marie Forleo's B-School or any of Ramit Sethi's courses. These usually begin with pulling in leads who are not very aware that they've got an actual problem and are far from aware that people exist who help others solve those problems. Leads are brought in via blog posts and videos; these blog posts and videos offer a healthy amount of explanation and storytelling to help increase the awareness level of readers/viewers...

Those leads are sent emails meant to boost awareness.

Those emails eventually land on pages that fully connect pains with their solutions.

And if you've ever been on an email list for people like Forleo or Sethi, you know that, as deadlines to purchase products get closer, emails get shorter, tighter, more to-the-point and focused on assurances, scarcity, incentives. As you move down the funnel, messaging gets tighter.

I'm not telling you this so you'll go write emails that sell.



(Though you should! Emails drive most businesses. Even SaaS.)

Rather, I'm telling you this to illustrate a point: **motivations and the amount of content required to tap into those motivations are different for people in different states of awareness.**

Which is why you need to answer:

1. "Do visitors to my site recognize that they have a problem that needs to be solved or an itch that needs to be scratched?"
2. "Do visitors to my site know that solutions exist?"
3. "Do visitors to my site know that my product is one of those solutions?"

From a conversion perspective, the more aware your visitors are of you, the easier it is to write copy. That's because, with *highly aware* visitors, you can spend less time educating... and more time closing the sale. With less aware visitors, you may need longer copy and more articles, more videos/tutorials, more indications of why you're better than the competition, and more content in general to help visitors recognize their pains / desires... see that they need a solution... and see that that solution is you.

### How to Uncover Your Visitors' State of Awareness

Use your analytics plus Qualaroo or Disco (or any great pop-up survey solution with robust reporting) to reveal states of awareness that can help you write better copy.

In your pop-up survey, ask this open-ended Q:

"What's happening in your life that brought you here today?"

This question is fantastic; I use it all over the place. You might learn that they clicked a link they saw in a Twitter post (possibly indicating lower-end awareness) or that they were sick and tired of using Excel to manage their finances and someone in their mastermind group told them to try you (possibly indicating higher-end awareness).

Analytics + AdWords is a no-brainer, too. Look at:

- The percentage of visitors arriving direct (i.e., typing in your URL): high awareness
- The percentage of visitors arriving via unbranded long-tail keyword phrases: low awareness of you, but higher awareness of their pain
- The percentage of visitors arriving after searching for your product/brand name specifically: high awareness



When you're writing your website copy, you can write landing pages targeted to various states of awareness, and direct people to those pages either via search or on-site navigation.

## REMEMBER: YOUR MESSAGE ISN'T YOUR MESSAGE AT ALL

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Your brand and your message alike need to be targeted to the market or market segments that will be most likely to sign up for your service or buy your product. So before you write a word of copy – hell, before you even name your company – you need to think of the expectations of your target market... and align everything you say and do with those.

*If you want to have a real business.*

If you're just killing time and money on a tool that you're going to be able to tell your mom you built – a tool with only your mom as your user base – then forget all of this. Put this book away. And be on your merry way.

I assume that's not what you want, though.

So there you have it – the tough love you need.

None of the words on your page will be your words. They will be words your customers need to hear. They will be words that express your customers' pain and reflect their deepest motivations while matching their state of awareness.

Which means you need to get to know them ASAP.

### **Learn Low-Budget Market Research from Tim Ferriss**

Tim Ferriss, author of *The 4-Hour Workweek* and *The 4-Hour Body*, is a creative problem-solver. When naming his first book, he bought PPC ads and tested various titles in those ads. The winning ad became the name of his book.

When determining the cover artwork for that same book, he printed out different covers and put those covers on other books in a bookstore – just to see which ones customers gravitated to. The cover that attracted most people became the cover for his book. Pretty effective... and low-budget.

NEXT STEPS  
~ APPLY WHAT YOU'VE LEARNED NOW ~

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Add Qualaroo or Disco to your key landing pages. For best results, keep the survey data separate, which may mean creating multiple unique surveys. It's worth the work!

Ask these 3 questions, in this order:

1. Are you male or female?
2. How old are you?
3. What's happening in your life that brings you here today?

An alternative for question #2, if you're B2B, is, *What's your role at work?*

The first 2 questions are short and easy, reducing the friction associated with completing a survey; they'll help you get a basic sense for whom to target your messages toward. The third will help illuminate how aware your visitors are of their pain and your solution. With this information, you'll be able to begin to shape a visitor persona for your key landing pages.

## 2.

# WRITE COPY FOR 20 TO 35% OF YOUR VISITORS – NOT 100% OF THEM

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So far, it should be clear that, when you're writing copy, you're thinking about what your visitor really wants. What will really make them happy. At a high level. And then deeper. You're answering the classic copywriter question:

### **What's in it for me?**

Now, your traffic is often a mumbo-jumbo of a boatload of types of visitors:

- Customers looking for support
- Customers trying to upgrade or buy more
- Prospects considering your product
- People reading your blog
- Searchers who may or may not be 'qualified' traffic
- People who read about you on Mashable
- People who saw your graphic on Pinterest

They're all your visitors. But they're not all your prospects. You can't write for all of them. You just can't.

You need to write for the visitors who are most likely to:

1. Do what you want them to do (because they want to do it)
2. Be pleased with the results of doing it
3. Be open to talking about your product and spreading the word

If you've ever tried to sell a house, you've probably been told to neutralize and depersonalize it. Pull down the wallpaper. Paint everything beige. Remove family photos. Make it smell like vanilla, not like the spicy curry you adore.

Real estate agents want you to neutralize a space because they believe that doing so will offend fewer people – people who may have different tastes than you have. Real estate agents take this approach because they are looking for just 1 buyer for that 1 house. Just 1 pre-qualified person to stumble on your house and buy it.

You, on the other hand, are looking for 100s of buyers for your 1 product or service. Which might make you think that neutralizing the space in which you sell your product – that is, neutralizing your website – is an even better strategy. After all, if you want to get 1000 buyers, you have to appeal to 1000 visitors. So you'd better make the whole thing one big beige blob.

NOT SO.

**If you try to make every visitor to your site happy, you'll end up saying nothing compelling, and your bank account cough up dust.**

Copy that tries to please everyone is copy that *sucks*.

Do you think it's an accident that the average website for a large organization converts at just under 2%? It's not.

That's what happens when you try to please every single person visiting your site: you get *maaaaybe* 2 out of 100 of them.

When you're a big company and can afford to buy traffic or hire entire teams for demand generation, that's fine (although still silly). But when you're a startup, that's unacceptable.

Trying to please every visitor with your copy is what's going to put you out of business.

Imagine the work it takes to drive 100 visitors to your site. Or 1000. Or 10,000. You need a serious write-up on TechCrunch to get 10,000. And their awareness is low! And their motivations aren't in line with what you're selling!

Imagine if you put all that work into attracting 10,000 visitors only to sell your solution to 200 of them. Admittedly, that doesn't sound *too* bad...

But what if you could have sold your solution to 500 of those visitors?

## GO NARROW TO CONVERT MORE VISITORS INTO CUSTOMERS

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If you want to convert more people, try to convert a smaller number of better-suited people. You should be targeting your copy towards the select but perfectly matched few *if you're serious about converting visitors into customers.*

Legendary adman and copywriter Fairfax Cone taught his copywriting team – people who went on to become presidents of major advertising agencies – that you should write to a single individual, not to the masses.

**Writing to the masses will weaken your copy.**

If you try to please a select few, you just might. If you try to please everyone, you please no one.

Same goes for your product.

**If your product is built for one small market segment, own that fact and speak directly to that segment in your copy.** This is a perfectly wonderful strategy for growth-focused startups. Be the company that 'gets' one segment.

So what if only 20% of all visitors to your site are in that segment? Imagine if you could convert half of those visitors! Suddenly your conversion rate becomes 10%. Even converting a quarter of that segment would result in a 5% conversion rate – which is more than double the average conversion rate for those willy-nilly, not-ready-to-speak-to-qualified-traffic-directly Fortune 500s.

Consider the highest-converting advertisements of the last decade.

You may be surprised to learn that direct mail – that ugly junk mail most of us throw into the recycle bin without opening – continues to convert higher than mass media and most websites. What can we learn from direct mail copy? Take this line from the envelope of one such piece for example:

*How to Legally Rob Slot Machines in ANY Casino!*

The majority of people disdain casinos, and almost everyone would shy away from the idea of robbing anybody or anything. So why did that headline convert well enough that the piece was sent out multiple times in 2005?

**Because it took the risk of being highly desirable to a select few over being recycled by the rest of the world.**

(See more about writing direct mail-style copy in *Copy Hackers Book 5: The Dark Art of Writing Long-Form Sales Pages.*)

The lesson: Don't try to write copy that will speak to 100%, 75% of 50% of visitors. You will end up converting no one.

Instead, write copy that will please your most qualified traffic – even if that's just 22% of all traffic – and thus stand a far better chance of converting a ton of those specific visitors.

**BONUS:** Qualified traffic that converts is more likely to stay with you and, if they're really happy with you, recommend you.

**EXTRA BONUS:** Once you get the message right for that segment, you can buy more traffic for that segment and enjoy better ROI than buying traffic that won't land on a page with targeted messaging.

**TIP:**

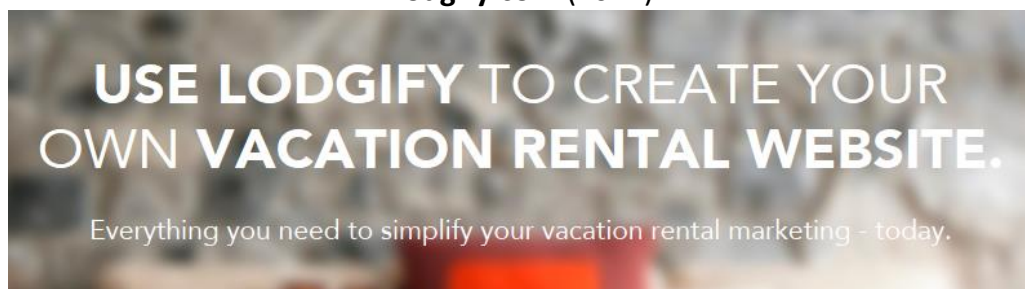
Your prospect needs to see him or herself reflected on the page. That's why we want to use the words they use and target them specifically with our messaging, our phrasing and even our photos. "Ideal for" statements can help with this. When you know whom your solution is made for, say so! Let your prospects see themselves in the very words you use.

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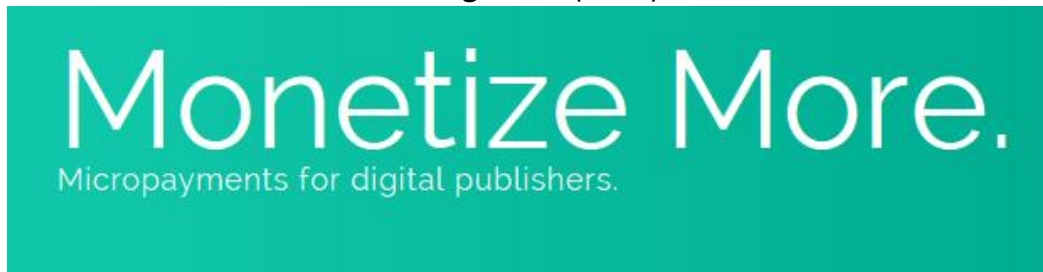
## EXAMPLES OF STARTUPS THAT GET THIS RULE RIGHT

Startups are explicitly focusing on niches in their home page hero sections already.

**Lodgify.com (2014)**



Cinegif.com (2014)



Pijonbox.com (2014)



CrazyEgg.com (2014)

Perfectly Suited for...

- 👤 Digital Marketers
- 👤 UX & UI Designers
- 👤 Web managers & analysts
- 👤 Agencies & consultancies

QuickSprout.com/Pro (2014)

Startups & content marketers alike are frustrated by the exact same problem today:

**"WE KNOW WE NEED TO AECIC DIIT"**

## THINK THIS STUFF IS A NO-BRAINER? EXAMPLES OF STARTUPS THAT MISS THE MARK

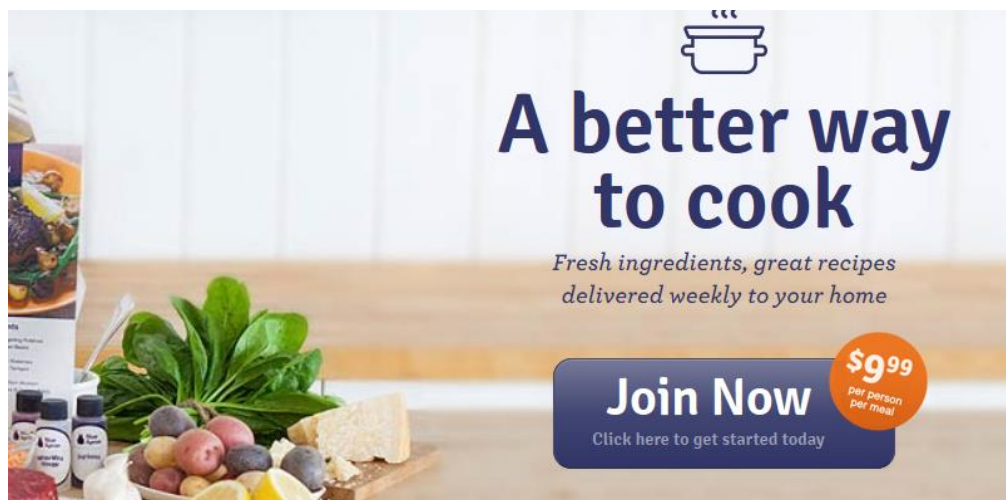
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It's beyond easy to lose focus on the core value of your offering – especially when you're under a deadline, too close to the project or desperately trying to attract VCs (who, you think, may not be interested in investing in something too narrow).

So before you go thinking that every startup would target their messaging, check out these examples – as well as what I'd test if I worked there.

Let's start with **BlueApron.com** (2014). They tell visitors that they're offering a better way to cook with fresh ingredients and great recipes delivered to you. So they're:

- Solving the pain of crappy stuff at the grocery store
- Solving the pain of having to go to the grocery store every day to get fresh produce
- Solving the pain of cooking well
- [Implied] Solving the pain of helping people who are too busy to cook the way they want to



At no point on the site does Blue Apron identify the people for whom their service is created. Surely it's not made for everyone! Small market segments would be attracted to this service, and visitors from those segments need to see themselves reflected on the page.

Now you don't have to explicitly call out the very market segments you're trying to attract. But does it hurt? It only hurts if you're a) still trying to attract 100% of your visitors and b) unsure whom your target market(s) really are. If B is true for you, go back to the last chapter and do the research suggested there. If A is true for you, *seriously*?

Blue Apron might instead try (see next page):





Or:



Now take a look at this headline and subhead combo from **LendKey.com** (2014), and answer the questions, “Who are they trying to target? Who are they speaking to?” (Or *whom* if you’re a stickler.)

## Power your lending with our technology.

Our cloud-based platform makes it possible for any party to quickly, securely, and profitably lend to anyone else.

According to their subhead, Lend Key’s platform works for *any party* lending to anybody. Which sounds like I can lend money to my sister using Lend Key. In fact, I cannot. Now, it could be that they never, ever get traffic from consumers or smaller independent ‘lenders’ to their site... but they very likely do. And for those lenders they’re actually trying to attract, they’re not making it clear at all that they’ve got a solution for:

- Community lenders
- Large institutions
- Like-minded lenders

You have to watch the video to see that Lend Key isn't for consumer-to-consumer lending. And it's not for big banks. It's for the businesses and investors in between.

But why not put that on the page?

Say whom your solution is right for. Target the 20 to 35% that's most likely to want your solution, be happy with it, keep paying for it, and tell others about it. Don't let your hard-won prospects slip away because you decided to "play it safe" by staying vague.

Vague is the enemy of conversion.

#### NEXT STEPS

~ APPLY WHAT YOU'VE LEARNED NOW ~

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If you've already written your website or copy for it, refer to that copy and ask yourself if it targets your ideal market or market segments ... or if it tries to please the larger majority. Revise your hero section / above-the-fold copy to ensure that your best prospects will see themselves reflected on the page.

If you don't know whom to target yet, test. Pick 2 large groups, and craft headlines targeted at each one, then A/B test them. When you find a winner, run another A/B test that helps you narrow your market or identify your market segments.

### 3.

## The Key Messages You Want to Look for

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Now that we've got a sense for the foundation of your messaging, from this point on, this book will help you seek out and discover the messages that are most likely to perform well on your site.

What you'll find is that you end up with a lot of information. Or, at least, that's what you should find. If you do the work. After all, your messages won't find themselves. They won't knock on your door. Elves won't gather them up for you while you sleep tonight.

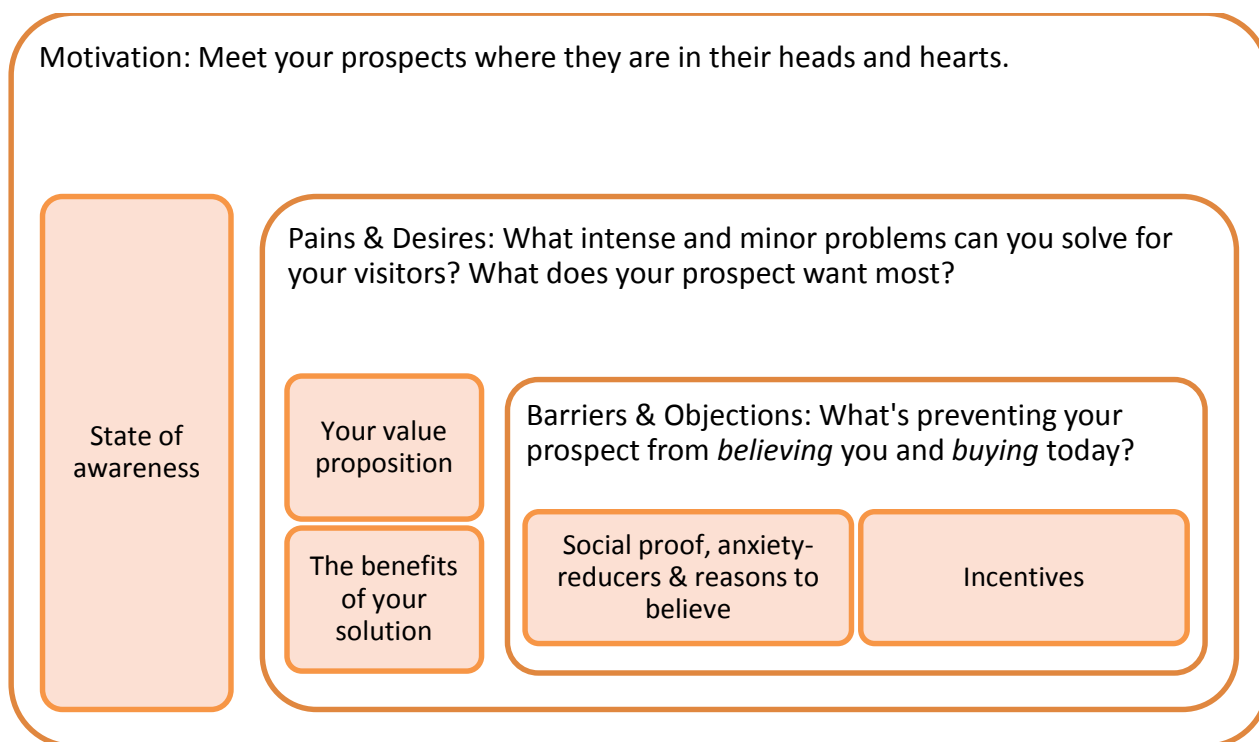
So do the work that follows.

And then you'll come to a point where you say, "Okay, great, Joanna. Now what?"

Then you organize your most important messages to make it easy for your prospects to a) find them and b) believe them so they c) convert today.

Now, I'm sorry, but there is no perfect reusable formula. I know a lot of marketers and copywriters sell a formula for everything – but they're just trying to sell you. In fact, if you want to get your message right for your audience, you'll need to write differently and organize your messages differently for different prospects.

That said, the following table should be in your head as you write each page on your site – as well as emails, App Store descriptions and more. (See next page.)



When you see the relationships between your messages, as in the above, you can start to see the way you'll need to think when organizing your messages on a page.

**Always start by joining the conversation already in progress in their minds.** What are they truly seeking? Their motivation will be closely tied to their state of awareness, as will their pains and desires.

Now, although your value proposition is one of the most critical components of your messaging, you need to think of it in relation to your visitors' pains and desires as well as your benefits...

From there, we can get into the deeper-level stuff: barriers and objections. Both can be overcome by great messaging about your benefits and value, which is why they're positioned in this table *alongside* your benefits and value prop. For those objections you can't stomp down in your copy, there are social proof points (testimonials), anxiety-reducers and reasons to believe (assurances). And when all else, there are incentives.

The more you write, the more the dots will connect.

## 4. HOW TO SWIPE MESSAGES FROM VISITORS & CUSTOMERS

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Your best messages come from your visitors, customers and prospects. These messages:

- Are written in natural language, wherever possible (i.e., not filtered)
- Often speak specifically to the very features that lead to certain desired benefits
- Use a tone and voice that may influence your brand personality decisions

The challenge is *finding* those messages. But, lucky for you, I've spent the last decade or so doing exactly that – and I've got a few tricks up my sleeve. Let's get right into them.

### SWIPE THE STICKIEST PHRASES FROM THEIR TESTIMONIALS

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Testimonials are not just persuasive social proof. They're also often home to sticky messages you can swipe – especially when your testimonials aren't forced (which they should never be as those put people to sleep).

In 2013, we worked with **KeepAndShare.com** to optimize their home page headline. This was their Control:

**Collaborate & Share & Store – Online**  
**Keep&Share Makes it Easy**

Not exactly a gem, but a common sort of beginning point for a lot of startups.

We drafted the following contenders to A/B test against it:

**End The Headache Of Constantly Emailing Files  
& Appointment Requests Back-And-Forth**

**The Only Small Business Collaboration Suite  
That Anticipates Your Every Move**

**The Only Small Business Collaboration Suite  
That Works The Way You Do**

Then I found myself looking through the testimonials of Keep and Share users. The tangible value noted in the following testimonial in particular stood out to me:

“ We love our 25-seat multi-user  
business account.  
How are we using it? To eliminate  
99% of our paper files! ”  
- Michael

So, based on that, we added the following variation to the mix and split-test them:

**Eliminate Up To 99% Of Your Paper Files**

The headline that we swiped from the testimonial beat the Control, bringing in 103% more clicks from the home page to the pricing page.

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## ASSESS AND MINE THEIR COMMUNICATIONS WITH YOU

This method requires no interruptions in your customers' or visitors' day. In fact, no one but you will even know you're swiping messages using the following techniques.

## Analyze Their Support Emails

Support and customer service go hand in hand – but did you know that the best copy hackers meet regularly with support folks to go over the problems people are experiencing with a solution? We do! Because the things your users will say in support emails often dig deep into the core challenges they were hoping your solution would eliminate for them.

Go through the last 100 or so support tickets you've got. Perhaps 15 of them will speak directly to a challenge that is not just technical. These emails can help you better understand your prospects' pains, desires and motivations.

## Analyze Their Tweets & Facebook Posts

Admittedly, analyzing tweets can be a little challenging because the 140-character limit forces people to choose short words when, in fact, they might naturally use longer words and more complex phrasing. Nonetheless, poring over your tweets – positive ones and mean ones alike – can reveal a lot.

When I was working on optimizing the **Flow by MetaLab** site in early 2014, I assessed [the tweets they'd favorited](#) in order to get a sense for Flow users' favorite features and to seek out examples of how Flow helped people. I learned:

With several #team members, we searched for the perfect team #taskmanagement app. @flowapp is by far the best of all we've tried.

Excited to finally have subtasks available in @flowapp it's been the missing piece for my workflow. Thanks guys!

Nice to see how apps like @flowapp and @SlackHQ become truly valuable when your team expands

newfound love for @flowapp: user instructions include @StarTrekNextGen references. #warppdrive #picard #crusher pic.twitter.com/ffgQfR9Xrs

I was able to triangulate that data / those insights with that which I'd found in interviews and surveys to create a more informed messaging hierarchy. Plus, I found little quirky insights that were worth pulling into the web copy – such as the point about Start Trek references. This all made its way into a mega-checklist on the page:

- ✓ Work in or out of your inbox (whatever you prefer)
- ✓ Prioritize like a pro with tasks and subtasks
- ✓ Unlock more value as your team grows
- ✓ Smile when you stumble on random Trekkie references

## INTERVIEW YOUR CUSTOMERS

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Get on the phone. Get on Skype. Set up a Google Hangout. Take your customer for coffee. Find a quiet corner in a pub.

It doesn't matter where you do it. Just start talking to customers.

This never, *ever* sounds appealing. Until you start conducting a few interviews. And then things get a lot easier and even interesting. Having held dozens and dozens of customer and past-customer interviews, I actually *like* doing them now – largely because I know I'm going to learn so much in an interview, it's worth the time and moments of discomfort.

There are brilliant strategies out there for interviewing customers, but here are my tips:

- Try to interview one person at a time, in privacy
- Allow a little time at the beginning to chat and establish a rapport
- Don't be overly friendly or jokey – keep that sense of objectivity
- Use a recorder – don't try to type as they talk
- Come prepared with a few questions, but let their responses help shape the convo
- Have a notepad and pen as you'll want to jot down points to return to or dig into
- Ask open-ended questions, not yes-or-no questions
- Because interviews with people reveal stuff that surveys can't – like visceral emotions and more honest motivations – do your best to gently push for the second and third layer of truth, not the first thing the customer says
- Don't do rapid-fire questioning! This isn't a poll; it's a conversation
- Let them do 95% of the talking
- Don't add your own stories to the mix unless they *specifically ask* to hear
- If you're going for coffee, buy their coffee!
- Always thank people for their time and willingness to help you

Expect the interview to run 45 minutes to an hour. When it's done, send it to be transcribed. Then, when you get the transcript, print out a copy, grab your highlighter, and head to a coffee shop to go through it. This will be very enlightening. Thank me later.



## SURVEY YOUR VISITORS AND CUSTOMERS: QUESTIONS I ASK MOST OFTEN

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If you're surveying your visitors and customers to help you craft your messages, the questions you ask your visitors and customers in surveys should be directly tied to what you're trying to do with your messaging. The gaps in your messaging.

Your survey questions should get to the sort of responses that will help you:

- Understand what compels people to seek out your solution in the first place (which speaks to motivation, pain and desire)
- Know what features in your solution produce the most desirable benefits
- Get a solid list – even a *loooooong* list – of your benefits
- Organize your benefits in order of most to least valuable for your best prospects
- Better visualize your target audience
- Use the words that your target audience uses to describe your solution

It's not market research. At least, you shouldn't think of it that way.

You should think of it as *messaging* research. Which means that, in some cases, you'll allow yourself to ask leading questions because you're not looking for the honesty or accuracy of a statement but rather for things like language. With that in mind, these are the questions I ask most commonly on visitor and customer surveys. Note that I work with B2B companies a lot, so many of these questions may not be perfect fits for B2C.

### Visitor Surveys (i.e., invite site visitors)

You do not have to ask all of these, and there are others you certainly may want to. In no particular order:

1. **WRITTEN RESPONSE:** What are you hoping to find or do here today?
2. **MULTIPLE CHOICE, ONE RESPONSE:** Which of these best describes you?
3. **MULTIPLE CHOICE, MULTIPLE RESPONSES:** What do you most want from a [insert type of business] like ours? (Select all that apply.)
4. **WRITTEN RESPONSE:** What 1 thing would you like to see us improve on our website?
5. **MULTIPLE CHOICE, ONE RESPONSE:** Do you think [product or site name] can help you save TIME or MONEY?
6. **MULTIPLE CHOICE, ONE RESPONSE:** Are you planning to purchase from [site name] today?

Responses to such questions can help you see:

- Jobs your visitors are trying to accomplish on your site, which can better inform your UX and site architecture
- Questions your visitors may need your site to better answer
- Messaging opportunities for time vs. money savings
- Intent to purchase

Put the same survey across your site, or, for more targeted and useful results, put different versions of the survey on different pages of your site or different sections. For example, you may want to keep the responses from your blog readers separate from the responses your PPC landing page visitors offer you.

### Customer Surveys (i.e., invite customers via email)

You do not have to ask all of these, and there are others you certainly may want to. In no particular order:

1. **MULTIPLE CHOICE, ONE RESPONSE:** How long have you been using [product name]?
2. **WRITTEN RESPONSE:** Please think back to when you first started looking for a solution like [product name]. What was going on in your life that made you want to seek out such a solution?
3. **WRITTEN RESPONSE:** If you had just 10 words to use to explain [product name], how would you describe it?
4. **WRITTEN RESPONSE:** How would you feel if you couldn't use [product name] anymore?
5. **MULTIPLE CHOICE, MULTIPLE RESPONSES:** In your opinion, which 3 of the following elements most set [product name] apart from other similar solutions?
6. **WRITTEN RESPONSE:** What 2 or 3 words would you use to describe [product name]?
7. **WRITTEN RESPONSE:** What, if anything, would you say is the most unexpected benefit or outcome you've realized thanks to [product name]?
8. **WRITTEN RESPONSE:** What 1 feature or tool in [product name] could you not live without?
9. **MULTIPLE CHOICE, ONE RESPONSE:** If you had to choose, would you say [product name] saves you TIME or MONEY?\*
10. **WRITTEN RESPONSE:** What's your title / role at work?

\*Responses to this question branch to related questions that ask the respondent to try to quantify time or money savings.

With responses to the above questions, you can start to identify and document:

- Impetuses and triggers for wanting your solution, which you can then use in your copy to better match / reflect visitor motivations

- Your most desirable differentiators
- The unexpected extras that will bring life to your copy and help set you apart
- The adjectives to use to describe your solution
- What's more important to your prospects: saving time, or saving money
- A richer customer profile / avatar

As a tip, in your CRM or customer database, divide your email list up by plans (or products) and then send individual surveys to those customer segments. By keeping the survey responses distinct between customers for different plan levels, you can better understand the chief differences between your higher-tier and lower-tier customers. Why would it matter? Because you may find you're ready to target mid-tier and higher prospects, which you can better do if you can filter out responses from lower-tier customers.

### NEXT STEPS

~ APPLY WHAT YOU'VE LEARNED NOW ~

---

Email 10 to 15 of your customers, and ask if you can speak with them. Perhaps 7 will agree, and maybe 4 will actually come to the interview instead of cancelling at the last minute. Interview those customers following the instructions shared in this chapter.

Also create a customer survey. If you have different customer segments you'd like to learn about, duplicate the survey as many times as is necessary. Invite your customers to take the survey (via email), and give them a due date so they're more likely to do it. Then analyze your data and document the key insights.

## 5.

### HOW TO FIND YOUR MESSAGE IF YOU DON'T HAVE CUSTOMERS YET (AND EVEN IF YOU DO)

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Your best messages come from your visitors, customers and prospects. But what if you don't have a website yet, so you don't have visitors or customers? You may have prospects (i.e., a target market in mind), but their awareness of you is painfully low, making connecting with them a near impossibility at this point.

How do you find your message if you don't have anybody to survey or interview?

Go find your prospects, and listen in on their conversations. Seriously.

As I noted in the previous chapter, you'll be looking for voice-of-customer data that helps you understand:

- What pains your prospects may be experiencing
- What anxieties, worries and fears they may have
- What objections they may have
- Their motivations
- What they value most and desire

You'll also find swipe-worthy, sticky messages. So you don't have to write 'em yourself!

### 3 BASIC METHODS FOR CUSTOMER-FREE MESSAGE-FINDING

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Got no money and you got no car? Then you got no woman, and there you are. But even without money and a car – and even without Young DMC lyrics – and even without customers of your own – you can get insights into what your prospects think, say and want.

#### 1. **Eavesdrop on conversations**

Your smartphone has a recorder built into it, and, if it doesn't, there are free ones available. So here's what you do: take your smartphone, and go sit near the groups of people representing those you'd like to target, ideally in settings where they'll talk about things that are relevant to the pain you're trying to solve for them, and hit 'record'. Don't be creepy. And don't video-tape them. (*That's* creepy!)

If you've got an app meant to make it easier for restaurant guests to order from their table, go to a few delis and restaurants, and record the ordering experiences of the people at the tables around you. Record the server *and* the guests.

If you've got an app meant to help sports parents be more supportive than competitive, go sit in a hockey rink a few weekends in a row, and record the way they speak and their chief concerns. Sit next to the player's box and observe the coach's increasing frustration with any particularly nasty parents.

This exercise can help you get a sense for tone and words to use as well as for the depth of the pain your solution is helping to eliminate.

#### 2. **Hire them in some way, and use that as an "in" to chat them up 1-on-1**

Let's say you're building an app to help hairstylists remember details about their clients so they can put on a show of being more engaged with clients, thus resulting in better tips and repeat visits. Book an appointment with a stylist, turn on your phone recorder, and, during that appointment, talk to them about their problems recalling client details. You'll get swipe-able messages... and a fresh new look.

Then ask your stylist and the salon owner if you can sit down with them to pick their brain about their needs. They might say no. But they might say yes. Especially if you give them free lifetime use of your app.

#### 3. **Ask their permission to listen in**

You're building an app to help teachers with their professional development needs. You know teachers in your area have Pro-D days. Why not go speak to a school

principal or someone at the school board to ask if you can please sit quietly and listen into their convos? Just ask! Ask until you get a yes. And then ask until you get a few more.

When you're done recording your prospects in their native environments, grab a notepad and listen to those recordings. You could take the easy way out and pay a service like Rev.com to transcribe the recordings for you... but then you miss out on all the great stuff that comes with hearing hems, haws and groans. So don't cop out. Listen and take notes.

## UNORTHODOX BUT POWERFUL: REVIEW MINING

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Although I completely swiped the basis of this idea from Jay Abraham, I've recommended it to so many people, with such great results, that it's becoming associated with Copy Hackers. It's simply this: pore over online reviews people leave for your products and for products like yours, and swipe messages from there. Done.

This can take a little practice. But, like all parts of research and discovery, it's worth it.

Importantly here, keep in mind that you're not selling a product with all sorts of wingdings, features and do-hickeys. You're selling your prospect a better version of themselves, so you'll want to branch out of the most obvious book topics and look for larger (but still relevant) topics...

### Amazon Review Mining

My favorite passive research method, Amazon review mining will see you look up books written on topics similar to that which you're trying to sell, and then going through the reviews for those books, one by one, to pull out interesting insights into objections, anxieties, and more.

	...look for...
If you're selling a project management app	→ Books on project management for dummies, advanced project management and project management for verticals
If you're selling shoes for toddlers	→ Books on parenting through the "terrible twos"
If you're selling an external flash for use with smartphone cameras	→ Books on amateur photography

### App Store Review Mining

Like Amazon review mining, go through the reviews of apps in categories like yours. If you have your own reviews to mine, great. Scoop your competitors', too.

Also try:

- Forum mining
- Blog comment mining
- TripAdvisor and AirBnB review mining
- *Mining any user-generated content available to you*

Does it work? I've used App Store review mining with every app client I've had. And I use Amazon review mining constantly; I used it when optimizing the home page of **Beachway Therapy** ([rehabilitation-center.org](http://rehabilitation-center.org), 2013). In this example, I went through what must have been 80 reviews across six books on alcoholism and drug abuse – books written for family members and addicts – and filled pages with interesting, sticky messages.

But one message in particular stood out for me.

We turned it into this headline:

**IF YOU THINK YOU NEED REHAB, YOU DO**

That beat the Control and continues, nearly two years later, to be the Control home page headline for Beachway. It was responsible for more than a 20% boost in leads, which is major when each client is worth \$20K/mo to the treatment centers like Beachway. So allow me to repeat: *Amazon Review Mining*.

## USE USERTESTING.COM ON COMPETITOR SITES (AND YOUR SITE)

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Now that UserTesting.com offers the ability to ask your natural site visitors to give you feedback while they're on your site, there's really no excuse not to use UserTesting.com. I incorporate UserTesting.com sessions into almost every project I take on.

When you watch users interact with your site and your competitors' sites, you learn about:

- Which questions need to be answered but aren't
- Great messages that stick
- Confusing or unclear messages
- Price objections
- The messages that stand out

### TIP:

If you're not sure what questions to ask in a visitor survey, use UserTesting.com first to identify possible hiccups or points of confusion.

- Weak or invisible elements, like testimonials or social sharing buttons
- The negative impact of a lack of social proof
- Use cases

These sorts of insights are gold when it comes time to write, update or A/B test your copy.

If you haven't set up a UserTesting.com test before, I recommend going with the template questions they offer. See what those reveal. Then, if you have deeper questions that you think more user testers should answer, book a few more sessions. You rarely need more than 5 users to start seeing themes and to pick out opportunities.

#### **BONUS:**

**Interview your employees or co-founders.** They've got loads of insights that need to make the leap from their head to yours – or, better, from floating around in space to documented in a simple report everyone can use. To improve the likelihood of people being honest, you may want to bring in a third party to conduct the interviews; this will allow YOU to be interviewed, too, which is good.

### **Do a Simple Competitor Content Audit (Home Page Only)**

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A good thing about a lot of startups is that you've got your pulse on what's going on. That's what most behemoth companies fail to do. The big guys think they know their competitors – and then in comes a little startup that takes market share away from them. Like Netflix took from Blockbuster, and like some small startup on the horizon could in turn take from Netflix.

You need to know who your competitors are. You need to know what they're saying, what expectations they may be setting, what claims they may be making. NOT to copy them. But to be aware. To be informed.

If you're not sure whom your competitors are, the companies showing up at the top of the SERPs for your keywords ARE your competitors.

Make a list of your primary competitors. Including the big guys. And the little guys.

And then audit them.

Yup. Audit them.



**Meet the Content Audit.** Pretty simple competitive research stuff. Like the voice-of-customer research you did earlier, this competitor research will help you get a grip on exactly what *messages* your competition is putting out there. That is, what messages many of your prospects have probably already seen.

Knowing those messages can help you understand:

- ✓ What visitors to your site **expect** to see (because you want to match expectations)
- ✓ What messages might soon be **white noise** (i.e., repeated too frequently), which you'll want to use sparingly or not at all
- ✓ Any glaring gaps in messaging
- ✓ What sort of tone or style others are – or aren't – using in their copy

Auditing your competitors' content will help you write kick-ass copy on your site.

Which is why professional copywriters do content audits and charge you \$20K for them.

Which is why you need to learn to do a simple content audit yourself – so you can get the goods for whatever I end up charging for this work of staggering genius.

**THE GOAL OF THE CONTENT AUDIT:  
to understand existing messages about solutions similar to your own**

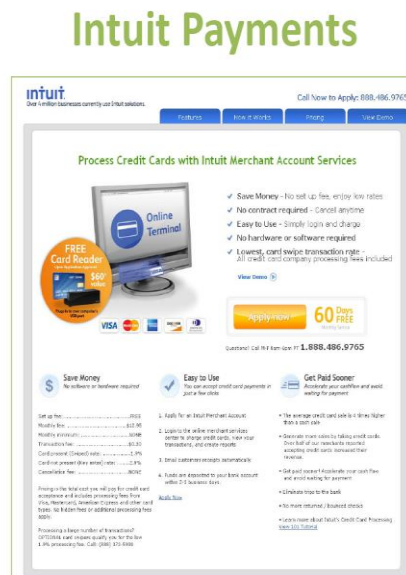
I recommend you focus your content auditing efforts on the home page of **a maximum of 10 competitors**. And I recommend that you focus on **analyzing these 5 things**:

1. The value proposition/headline
2. The major messages you know they're trying to communicate to visitors
3. The primary call(s) to action – language, visual design and position on the page
4. The special reasons to buy (i.e., guarantees and assurances that might compel a visitor to take out their credit card)
5. Other seriously cool stuff that **wows** you

I do my content audits in a PPT deck. Each site I audit gets two pages: one for a screen capture of the home page I'm auditing; the other for the audit itself.

The following page shows an example of the screens I did when I audited Intuit Merchant Account Services's home page (2011).

Screen One: Capture the screen for your records



Screen Two: Fill in the top messages you see on that captured screen

## Intuit Payments

<http://intuitpayments.com/creditcardprocessing>

## Value Proposition

"Process Credit Cards with Intuit Merchant Account Services"

## Top Messages

- "Save Money – No setup fee, enjoy low rates"
- "No contract required – Cancel anytime"
- "Easy to Use – Simply login and charge"
- "No hardware or software required"
- "Lowest card swipe transaction rate – All credit card company processing fees included"

## Primary Call(s) to Action

- "Apply Now / 60 Days Free – Monthly Service"
- "Questions? Call 1.888.486.9765"
- "View Demo"

## [Additional] Reasons to Believe

- "FREE Card Reader"
- "Save Money: No software or hardware required"
- "Easy to Use: You can accept credit card payments in just a few clicks"
- "Get Paid Sooner: Accelerate your cashflow and avoid waiting for payment"

Logos for top 5 credit cards accepted clearly displayed near C2A.

Elimination of setup fee and 1st 60 days' fees... plus free card reader.

Clear explanation of costs:

Set up fee	.....FREE
Monthly fee	.....\$12.95
Monthly minimum	.....NONE
Transaction fee	.....\$0.30
Card present (swiped) rate	.....1.9%
Card not present (key enter) rate	.....2.9%
Cancellation fee	.....NONE

After auditing the home pages, you need to **synthesize** what you've learned in order to understand more about the messages... and shape your own messaging strategy.

How? Stay in PPT, and create simple tables that help you break apart the messages.

## VALUE PROPOSITION TABLES

**3 columns.** One column is for the name of the competitor. The second is where you'll list the actual value props. (Note that some sites may not have a value prop.) And the third is where you'll pull out the benefits highlighted in each value prop, keeping it short and sweet. (For example, "security", "ease" or "affordability".)

	Value Prop (on Home Page)	Benefits Highlighted
CHASE Paymentech	n/a	n/a
Flagship	We offer our merchants guaranteed low rates & fees, free merchant account set-up, free gateway setup, free reprogramming, and a guaranteed lowest overall cost commitment, which is why so many businesses like yours choose us for their credit card processing needs.	Free/ Price/ Affordability
Intuit	Process Credit Cards with Intuit Merchant Account Services	n/a
Authorize	Authorize.net Enables Merchants to Accept Payments Safely and Easily	Safety/Security Ease
Merchant Express	Accept Credit Cards for Your Business	n/a
ProPay	Simple, Secure and Affordable Payment Solutions	Safety/Security Affordability Ease
Accept Pay	Collect Payments Easily. Get Paid Faster.	Ease Speed of payment (e.g., cashflow)

## TOP MESSAGES TABLES

**Columns for each competitor, plus 2.** The leftmost column is where you'll write, in rows, short versions of the top messages. The rightmost column is where you'll tally the number of sites on which each message is used. And in the middle? Columns for each site you audited, with tickmarks down the column to indicate if X message was used on that website.

The following page shows an example:

	Flagship	Intuit Payments	Authorize	ProPay	Accept Pay	Total
Security			X	X		2
Accept credit cards			X	X	X	4
No software/ Included software	X	X			X	3
Low/ Competitive rates & fees	X	X	X	X		4
Free/ Incentives/ Offers	X	X				2
Support	X		X	X	X	4
Cancel anytime		X				1
Easy to use		X		X	X	3
Get approved/ started fast			X	X		2

As you can see, by looking at this table, a copy hacker can get a quick overview of the top messages his competitors are trying to communicate. The totals help you see the most common messages... which could be white noise, due to overuse, or which could be a baseline that your visitors expect to see reflected in your copy.

**This audit can also provide some insights.** For example, in the above example, it's clear that the messages "Accept credit cards", "Low/Competitive rates & fees" and "Support" are important ones. Do you know if *your* visitors expect to read about support on your home page? Had you considered that?

**That said, are these EFFECTIVE messages?** I don't know that yet. I *can't* know that. But I'm not trying to know that, either.

Not yet.

This is just an audit. Later, you can assess and test the messages.

## PRIMARY CALL-TO-ACTION TABLES

**Columns for each competitor, plus 2.** The leftmost column is where you'll write, in rows, the calls to action (C2A). The rightmost column is where you'll tally the number of sites on which each C2A is used. Columns for each site you audited go in the middle, with tickmarks – just as in the previous table.

Although this table may prove to list things that you feel are no-brainers, it can also help you to consider the importance of putting certain C2As above the fold on your home page.

For example, you may find that all of your competitors have a great, big demo link on their home pages.

With that information, you can at least make a more informed decision about whether or not you, too, will offer a demo front-and-center on your home page.

	Flagship	Intuit Payments	Authorize	ProPay	Accept Pay	Total
Call sales/ to sign up	x	x	x		x	4
Logon/ Sign in				x		1
Create an account	x	x	x		x	4
Select your business type	x					1
Watch demo		x			x	2

Now you understand existing messages about solutions similar to your own. So you can use that understanding to *inform* your own messaging.

#### NEXT STEPS

~ APPLY WHAT YOU'VE LEARNED NOW ~

---

Complete the Amazon review, content audit and value proposition tables on the next pages. If you've only got time for one of the three exercises, I recommend the Amazon review.

## AMAZON BOOK REVIEW: CONTENT MINING

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Be sure to visit [CopyHackers.com](http://CopyHackers.com) for a range of templates like these.*

Memorable Phrases	What People Want	What People Are Mad About / In Pain Over

**BOOK REVIEWS MINED:**

✓

## VALUE PROPOSITION TABLE

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Company or Site	Value Proposition (on Home Page)	Benefits Highlighted

## TOP MESSAGE AND/OR CALL TO ACTION TABLE

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Message or Call to Action	Company A:	Company B:	Company C:	Company D:	Total



## 6.

### HOW TO TELL SWIPE-WORTHY MESSAGES FROM JUNK

---

Even if you do nothing more than a survey, an Amazon review-mining exercise and five UserTesting.com sessions, you will find that you have a lot of written material to go through. You want to find the best, stickiest natural language to swipe. But how do you know what's good... and what's not?

First, frequency of messages is important. How often are people saying the same or similar things? The more it comes up, the more it matters.

From there, develop a sharper ear for great messages by learning about *rhetorical devices*.

Okay, I know that sounds dry and boring – unless you're a word nerd – but trust me: it's not. This is the part of the copy hacking experience where you start making things sound good. Not clever. Not cute. Not desperate for attention.

Good.

Good enough that people keep reading. So you can keep overcoming their objections. And neutralizing their anxieties. And introducing benefits and features that will delight them.

## SWIPE MESSAGES THAT USE THESE 6 LITERARY TECHNIQUES, OR EDIT TECHNIQUES LIKE THESE IN

---

We're not trying to be literary masters, but we are trying to draw people in with our copy. Not in a clever way. In a smart way. These techniques help bring your words to life, make reading your copy pleasurable and create a richness that separates good copy from dry, robotic drivel no one but your loving mama would read...

### Repetition, Ideally in Sets of 3 (aka *Anaphora*)

Things sounds better when they're grouped in threes, and repeating the same word at the start of 3 sentences or clauses in a row can help your copy "sound nice". We used this device in the subhead for **CrazyEgg.com** (2014):

Choose Crazy Egg heat maps when Google Analytics isn't enough ...  
When your clients and C-levels need a snapshot of user behavior ...  
Or when you're considering a website redesign or an A/B test ...

### Hyperbole + Similes

Exaggerations grab our attention, and similes help give us critical frames of reference. Together, these can often lead to word pictures. And word pictures are good. They create sticky images in your visitors' heads that help them better recall what you said.

In an article on **Phandroid** (2012), a blogger described **Snapseed** with this swipeworthy bit of hyperbole-meets-simile:

**Google Already Using Snapseed For  
Android (It's Like Instagram On Steroids)**

### IfTTT

Although we make decisions emotionally, we justify them with logic. That's why phrases that are cues for logic – such as "If this then that" – can resonate especially well in web, email and mobile copy.

I swiped an IfTTT phrase from the Amazon review I mentioned earlier, which resulted in the winning headline for **Beachway** (2014), shown on the next page:

## IF YOU THINK YOU NEED REHAB, YOU DO

Break free of the grip of substance abuse and addiction today. How? With the help of the dedicated team and holistic approach at Beachway Therapy Center.

### Comparisons to What People Know


You may have heard that Hollywood movie pitches tend to take an existing movie and twist it. So *Aliens* was pitched as “*Jaws* in space”. When we introduce something new by framing it in the context of something that’s already known, we reduce confusion.

If you’re reading through your customers’ survey responses or your Amazon review mining and you find yourself noticing comparisons to brand names, you may tell yourself, “Well, that’s cool, but we can’t actually compare ourselves to X competitor.” But can’t you? As long as you’re not misrepresenting another brand or your relationship with them, you may be able to compare yourself to what’s already known, or to the incumbent.

GrooveHQ.com (2014)

## The Simple Alternative to Zendesk

When I was optimizing the home page / one-pager for **GetFlow.com** (2014), countless survey respondents compared the software to Basecamp, Asana and Wunderlist. So I recommended this:



Choose Flow when spreadsheets, white boards and sticky notes just won't do...  
When Wunderlist and Trello aren't quite enough...  
Or when Basecamp and Asana are overkill...

Now those comparisons aren’t exactly “*Jaws* in space”, but they’re good to keep in mind when you’re poring over your voice-of-customer data.

### Anthimeria

Anthimeria is the name smarties give to the effect of generating rhetorical flair by forcing a word to ‘behave’ differently than grammar teaches us it ought to. A few examples:

That’s so fail.  
Because math.  
The future of awesome. (Xfinity)  
Think different. (Apple)

This is one of many rhetorical devices that our brains dig. So make go.

### Living Sounds

Again with the goal of stickiness, sound patterns – represented by words that ‘create’ a sound in structures that have a corresponding rhythm – can find their way more easily into our memories than mere facts or bland phrases ever could. When analyzing your voice-of-customer data, look for phrases like:

“Every time my phone buzzes with a new message, I feel a zing of joy”

“The soft sounds lulled my little one to sleep”

### Rhyming (Even, or Especially, Subtle Rhyming)

In 1998, Psychology Today wrote about a study conducted by Matthew McGlone, PhD. McGlone gave students a list of phrases that rhyme and phrases that don’t. Like “Woes unite foes” vs “Misfortunes unite foes”. He found that students believed the rhyming phrases more accurately described human behaviors.

Rhyming carries a natural cadence, and rhyming phrases often stick. But you don’t have to be heavy-handed. See how **Animoto.com** (2013) does it in their subhead:

## How to make a video

Simple and fun, three steps and you're done!

If you find that picking and choosing the best messages from your voice-of-customer data doesn’t come naturally to you, that’s okay. You’re not alone. There’s actually a really fun way you can solve that problem: read a great novel. Read lots of them. The more you read, the better you’ll identify phrases that are sticky, catchy and memorable.

And that’s good for conversion.

## 7.

### FIND & DOCUMENT YOUR FEATURES AND BENEFITS

---

If you were only to focus on the things your customers want to hear, you'd probably end up saying a bunch of stuff that was only half-true or that sounded a lot like what everyone else is saying.

Your messages must be what your customers want to hear... but let's not forget that they also need to be unique to your product. The things that are *unique to your product* will make people want to buy your product – versus buying the competitor's or not buying at all.

Once you convince your visitor that you're all about them and their pains, which you are, you need to connect their pains with your solution. That means you need to talk about your solution. (It's about time, right?)

Talk about your features. And your benefits.

**What's the difference between a feature and a benefit?** Start by answering these 2 questions:

1. What value will my user / customer get out of using this?  
(benefit)
2. What part of my product lets the user / customer get that value?  
(feature)

As you may have noticed, those 2 Qs require you to think first about your benefits, not about your features. But a lot of startups think about their features first. You think about:

- Your cool-looking dashboard
- Drag-and-drop report-creation
- The 22 (!) reports your users can run in a click
- That embeddable chat widget you spent 2 weeks coding
- The flat-but-not-too-flat design you spent \$5K on
- The 360-degree view of their business your users get
- In-app search
- Integrated apps

Those are all features.

The benefits of each are the answers to, “What does my customer get out of using this?”

I think a lot of the confusion lays in the fact that there are layers of benefits and, when we separate UX, UI and pure functionality, there are layers of features.

It’s not a 1:1 relationship.

You might have one feature with three related benefits. You might have one feature that’s beautifully designed, but the design isn’t a benefit – the outcome of that beautiful design is.

And so, although this isn’t a worksheet, allow me to recommend you use the following table when you’re trying to document your features and their corresponding benefits (which you should do before you start writing).

List your features. Then tick the appropriate boxes if the feature is related to a user experience, to the visual design, to pure functionality, or to any of the above. From there, list the benefit(s) your users are likely to derive immediately upon using it. Follow that with the “higher-level” benefit, which is more about your users’ motivations, discussed earlier.

Feature	UX?	UI?	Fxn?	Direct Benefits of Using	Higher-Level Benefits of Using
Cool-looking dashboard	x	x	x	- See your most urgent issues at a glance	- Dazzle your boss in presentations - Grow the business
Drag-and-drop report-creation	x		x	- Customize your own reports - Instantly see your bottom line	

## KNOW YOUR PRODUCT: DOCUMENT ALL YOUR FEATURES

---

When I was writing websites for Intuit, I would keep something I called the “product positioning document” (created by the dev team) open on one monitor and the Word doc with the copy I was writing open on my other monitor. I used that document for *everything*. I still use these actively – and you should, too.

A product positioning document will be your best friend as you write your own copy.

Even if you think you know your product inside-out because, after all, you built or helped build the damn thing, do yourself a big favor: **document all your features in a simple, clear product positioning doc**. I provide one here and in an easy-to-print form on my site.

Here’s what you’ll need to do:

1. **Create a table (or use the provided table) with 5 columns:**
  - a. *Feature*
  - b. *Unique to Us?*
  - c. *Customer Pain Solved*
  - d. *Benefits*
  - e. *Priority*
2. **In the *Feature* column, list every single feature you have.** Leave out nothing. You think some feature is small? Well, if that one small feature makes it into a bullet list on your site, you never know, someone else might think it’s major enough to put you above your competition in their mind. **NOTE:** Do not start toying with the words at this point. You are not writing copy.
3. **In the *Unique to Us* column, give yourself a checkmark** if the feature is something only your solution offers. If the feature is offered by a competitor, list each competitor that has it. And if the feature is similar to a competitor’s feature, briefly describe that here.
4. **In the *Customer Pain Solved* column, refer to the customer research you did earlier.** Note the customer pain that each feature solves or at least addresses, and, if you have multiple market segments, be sure to indicate which segment X feature solves for. For best results, insert actual voice-of-customer language in this column.

(You’ll be working with the fourth and fifth columns shortly.)

As you list out your features, you may start recognizing the value of each feature quickly; feel free to jot that value in the *Benefits* column. You may also find yourself categorizing features that are similar to each other. That’s good, too.

Do whatever helps you produce a nicely organized table that you will be able to use to write copy later. If you offer more than one product, create a product positioning document for each flavor. And if you want to list multiple layers of benefits, add additional columns.

Let's return to the worksheet you were working on: the product positioning document. You've completed the first three columns, which were focused on features and pain points, and now it's time to fill in the critical fourth column: *Benefits*.

5. **Using what you've just learned, assign at least one express benefit to every feature.** Some features may have multiple benefits. If you find features that have no express benefit – that is, where you have to stretch to make a benefit fit – then scratch it off your list; your customer won't need to learn about it on your website.

You have just one column remaining: *Priority*. This column is intended to help you rank the features and benefits that rise to the top and will, thus, be most important for your visitors to see at key points in the experience.

Not every feature is a gem, and not every benefit will be compelling to your segment. Assigning a priority to each row will help you, as you're writing, craft a messaging hierarchy to determine whether to emphasize or subordinate copy for each feature+benefit.

There are no rules around what you use to indicate priority. You can use color-coding if you'd like or numbers (e.g., "1" = "high priority"). I like to use words: *high, medium, low*.

So let's complete our product positioning doc by filling in the last column: *Priority*.

6. **Assign a rank to each feature+benefit.**

That's it! You've completed the product positioning document.

You will be able to use this document for every page you write, for every email, and for your in-product messaging. I encourage you to spend the time necessary to get this document – this lengthy, possibly ugly document – as nailed-down as possible. But remember! You're not 'wordsmithing' here. You're just *listing* with as much detail as you need. The copywriting comes later.

#### MESSAGING HIERARCHY:

The order in which your benefits, features and counter-objections should appear on each page and across your site are part of your messaging hierarchy.

Your hierarchy doesn't have to be formalized, but the Priority column you'll complete in this table can help you understand your hierarchy.

Keep the table from Chapter 3 in mind while you consider your messaging hierarchy.



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## SHOULD YOU SUMMARIZE BENEFITS OR GET SPECIFIC?

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Please don't fall into the trap of summarizing when you're copywriting. Many marketers focus so much on trying to cut down on word count that they cut out all the juiciness of a statement just to make it fit a 6-word space.

The good copywriter who finds herself constrained by space will not dilute the message in order to squeeze it in somewhere.

Instead, she'll choose shorter, tighter words or fewer words that have greater impact.

Why?

**Because a summary is not noticeable or memorable, and we want our copy to be both noticeable and memorable.**

Specifics stick.

When you're listing out your benefits in your product positioning document, be specific.

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## THE BENEFITS OF *HOW* YOU DO WHAT YOU DO

---

The elements that go into your product or solution – that is, your features – each have benefits. But let's not forget about the benefit of *how you build your solution*. Startups and experienced copywriters alike often overlook this key differentiator.

Not every benefit aligns with a feature. Some benefits sit outside features entirely and speak instead to things like design and corporate values. These are the benefits of *how* you do what you do, and they may include:

- Minimizing our carbon footprint by using only FSC paper products
- Making it fun to do your bookkeeping with a cartoon-like look-and-feel
- Sharing the love by donating to 1% for the Planet
- Protecting animal rights by using only vegan-certified materials

*Every* benefit to using your solution is a benefit worth sharing! So document these, too.

**IMPORTANT:** Benefits tell your prospects what's in it for them, which is how it will improve their lives, how it will make them a better version of themselves. Features that do not have clear benefits are features you should not mention in your copy.

NEXT STEPS  
~ APPLY WHAT YOU'VE LEARNED NOW ~

---

Complete the product positioning document on the following page. You'll need your product positioning doc no matter what you're writing – and, when your startup grows, you'll need it to help new hires understand the essentials.

Note that your product positioning document is a living document. You should update it as you learn new things about your market, as you tweak your product and as you run A/B tests. If you do a new 'push' of your solution, you should revisit the document entirely.

# PRODUCT POSITIONING DOCUMENT

*Print this page from the PDF version of your ebook copy.  
Be sure to visit [CopyHackers.com](http://CopyHackers.com) for a range of templates like these.*

Feature	Unique to Us?	Customer Pain Solved	Benefit	Priority

To help you:

1. Features exist or will exist in your product.
2. Use your content audit to determine if the feature is unique to you or not.
3. Use actual language from the research you've done to fill in Customer Pain Solved.
4. The benefits may also use voice-of-customer language. You may have multiple layers of benefits.
5. You may wish to base the priority on how frequently a pain, need or benefit came up in your research. This priority can help you establish a messaging hierarchy.

## 8.

# STOMP DOWN OBJECTIONS, AND GIVE PROSPECTS & CUSTOMERS REASONS TO BELIEVE

---

Visitors may come to your site with objections already in their minds, and visitors may form objections as they navigate your site and read your copy. Your job as a copy hacker is to know the most common objections... and prevent, pre-empt or respond to them in order to stomp them down.

If you do not stomp their objections down, you will not be able to sell to these individuals.

## WHAT IS A SALES OBJECTION?

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A sales objection is the mental barrier to purchasing that is created by feelings of opposition or disagreement with the value your service offers. Objections are borne of potential customers misunderstanding or *undervaluing* the value of your product or service.

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## THE 8 MOST COMMON SALES OBJECTIONS

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Almost every sales course will tell you that there are 8 buyer beliefs that are at the root of every objection a potential customer or client has:

1. I don't really NEED this
2. I don't have the AUTHORITY to buy this or switch to your offering

3. I don't want to be SOLD TO (especially if closing requires a phone conversation)
4. I have to PRIORITIZE other things above this right now
5. My EXISTING SOLUTION works well enough
6. Your company doesn't have the CAPABILITY or the CREDIBILITY
7. I don't think your PRICES are reasonable
8. I will have to spend a lot of time and energy CONVINCING OTHERS around me

The way to overcome any objection is to prevent, pre-empt and respond to each objection.

- **Prevention** takes place off your website, in your marketing and PR.
- **Pre-emption** takes place on your site, generally speaking (although it can also take place in marketing and PR).
- **Responding** takes place in your sales support channel, whether that's live chat on your site, email support for sales, social media monitoring, or phone support for sales.

---

### PREVENT OBJECTIONS IN YOUR MARKETING, SOCIAL MEDIA & PR

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You can prevent objections by doing your best to steer online conversations about your product in a positive manner.

If people are presenting objections to your product on social sites, such as Twitter, it's your job to monitor that and manage those objections – but that's still just reacting.

As a marketer, you need to own (but not control) the messages about your product, wherever those messages are. You need to be the one initiating conversations so you can effectively manage the communication of your offering, whether in banner advertising or press releases.

But what does that have to do with copywriting?

Well, if a bunch of the traffic arriving at your demo-creation site is coming only because they read an article about demo-creation tools being crappy, then your copy is going to have to do a lot of work to respond to those objections. *It will be very, very difficult to overcome those objections at that point.*

Better to do your best in your marketing and PR – including on your blog and in social media – to prevent objections from arising and spreading.

---

### PRE-EMPT OBJECTIONS ON YOUR WEBSITE, ESPECIALLY IN FAQs

---

To pre-empt objections, your copy needs to do two things:

1. Redirect your visitors to see the value of your offering
2. Remind them of how your offering solves one of their key pains and/or satisfies their motivation

But note that not every visitor will have the same objection the next visitor will have.

If your product is reasonably priced or even ‘cheap’, your copy probably won’t need to pre-empt price objections. On the other hand, if your product is enterprise-level software for real estate brokers, your copy may have to pre-empt several objections – from *need* to *authority* to *fear of being sold to* to *price*.

There are generally 2 ways for you to pre-empt objections on your website: directly or indirectly.

### 1. PRE-EMPT OBJECTIONS DIRECTLY

---

The 8 most common sales objections I listed earlier are the very objections you will, in your copy, try to pre-empt. When you pre-empt objections directly, you specifically pinpoint an objection and openly address it.

**The best place to address the more *minor* of these objections is in your FAQs on your pricing page.**

For the major objections – the ones you know your potential customers will need real help overcoming – you should focus crafting copy that you’ll place on the highest-traffic pages. These pages could include your home page and the first page of your cart.

**If an objection is particularly difficult to conquer, you *may* wish to dedicate an entire page to it.** Most objections can be overcome by centering on the value of your offering and reminding people of what motivated them to consider you in the first place.

**Bellstrike.com (2011, 2014)**

Objection: My EXISTING SOLUTION works well enough.

## Why Bellstrike?

Having a great website with **online giving** is becoming more and more important. **\$15 billion of the \$229 billion** that individuals give to nonprofits annually comes online. And it's **growing at over 40% a year** (and growing fastest for really small nonprofits). Studies show that online donations are **like a gateway drug**; they lead to larger and more frequent gifts - both online and off.

### MetaWatch.org

Objection: Your company doesn't have the CAPABILITY or the CREDIBILITY.

2011

Our team has 25 cumulative years experience in technology watches & has been shipping Bluetooth watches since 2006.

2014

Our team has 25 cumulative years experience in developing technology watches & has shipped nearly 250,000 smartwatches since we began working together.

### RemoteAntiSpam.com (2011)

Objection: I don't want to be SOLD to.

NO PUSHY SALES PERSON  
WILL CALL

SIMPLY MAKE UP YOUR MIND IN  
YOUR OWN TIME

WHEN YOU ARE SATISFIED,  
RETURN TO OUR SITE AND SIGN  
UP

THATS IT. IT'S THAT SIMPLE

## 2. PRE-EMPT OBJECTIONS INDIRECTLY

Sometimes the best way to pre-empt objections is not to address them outright but to follow the old writing mantra: **show don't tell**. Show people counter-objections rather than directly hitting them over the head with a comeback to an objection.

### 23andMe.com (2011)

Objection: I will have to spend a lot of time and energy CONVINCING OTHERS around me.

Indirectly pre-empted by *giving it* to those people you might need to convince.

(See next page.)




### FingerPrint (FingerPrintPlay.com) (2011)

Objection: Your company doesn't have the CAPABILITY or the CREDIBILITY.

Indirectly pre-empted by highlighting the team's impressive experience in the industry.

**Team**



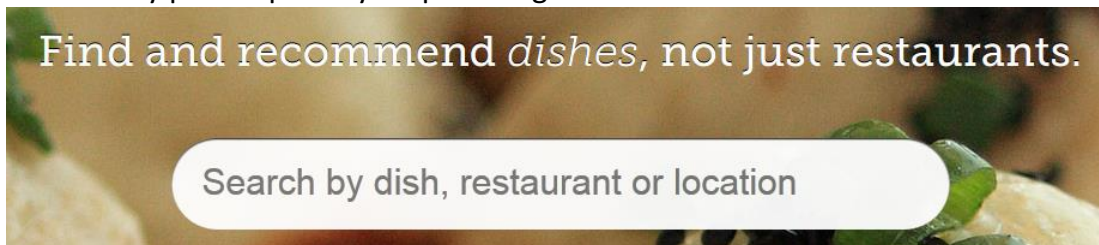
**Nancy MacIntyre, CEO and Co-Founder**

Nancy was EVP of Product Innovation & Marketing at LeapFrog where she led the charge around connected learning with the launch of the Learning Path Online, Tag Reader and Leapster Gaming System. Obsessed with the possibilities presented by touch screen devices, she left in 2010 to seek her fortunes in Mobile. Before LeapFrog, Nancy was VP Global Sales and Marketing at LucasArts where she traveled the world marketing a lot of Star Wars games. Earlier, she was VP Marketing at

### Foodspotting.com (2011)

Objection: My EXISTING SOLUTION works well enough.

Indirectly pre-empted by emphasizing that other similar sites are too narrow.



### Invoicera.com (2011)

Objection: I don't think your PRICES are reasonable.

Indirectly pre-empted by discussing pricing options and showing potential incentives in FAQs.

#### Can I pay for a year in advance?

Yes. You would be entitled for a 12% discount if you decide to commit to a year of subscription. However, it is not mandatory to go for annual subscription and you also have the option to subscribe for monthly or semi-annually service. All three options would be available to you when you choose your plan.

### Payvment.com (2011)

Objection: My EXISTING SOLUTION works well enough.



Indirectly pre-empted by showing other known retailers already using this service, suggesting, *If they didn't mind switching, why should I?*

60,000+ Active Sellers



**WildFireApp.com (2011)**

Objection: I have to **PRIORITIZE** other things above this right now.

Indirectly pre-empt concerns about not having the time to sign-up versus other priorities.



## WHAT IF PEOPLE DON'T NEED THE SOLUTION YOU'RE OFFERING?

---

Not every objection can be overcome, and some objections take more effort to overcome than others.

But what if people really don't need your solution? How do you overcome that?

Start by reminding yourself that almost nothing we buy in the world is something we need. We don't buy based on need; need is not emotional. *Need* comprises the bottom rungs of Maslow's hierarchy.

**We buy based on an emotional pull we have to something. We buy based on want.**

- I don't *need* a [well-designed, user-friendly, gamified] project management tool to replace [my clunky] Excel
- I don't *need* a \$6 latte, and I don't need it from Starbucks, but I look forward to getting one every Saturday and Sunday morning

- Nobody needs a whoopee cushion, but they're funny as hell to ten year-olds – and humor is a powerful emotion
- I don't need a big, burly motorcycle, a 4-carat diamond ring, Citizens of Humanity jeans or first-class flights, but when I can afford the above, I buy them – and I wouldn't even describe myself as an avid consumer

You are operating a business in a consumer-rich world. Which means the *easiest* objection to overcome may very well be the 'need' objection.

## USE "REASONS TO BELIEVE" TO HELP DELIGHT YOUR VISITORS

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Sometimes you can't overcome every objection. Those times call for reasons to believe.

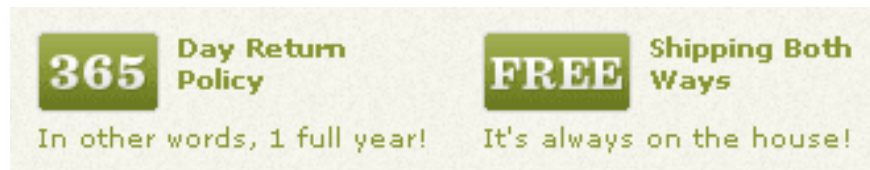
Often called *assurances*, reasons to believe are the promises you make as a company to your customers. They're often delightful. They're the extra oomph your prospects need to choose you – or at least give you a shot with a trial. For example:

- Money-Back Guarantee
- Lowest Price Guarantee
- Free Shipping
- Next-Day Shipping
- We Pay the Tax
- Guaranteed Secure
- #1 Best-Selling X
- #1 Most-Trusted X
- World's Largest Selection of X
- The Only Licensed Retailer of X
- No-Questions-Asked Returns
- 24/7 Customer Service

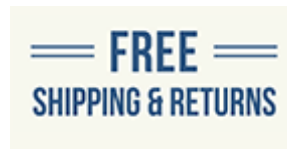
Reasons to believe appear – and should appear – across your site at key moments in which a visitor may need to believe in you *a little more* in order to convert. The closer customers get to the funnel, the more readily you'll want to display your top reasons to believe. That's how you get people to click and continue on their journey to the receipt page.

Here's an example of easy-to-find graphically treated reasons to believe from **Zappos.com** (see next page):

2011

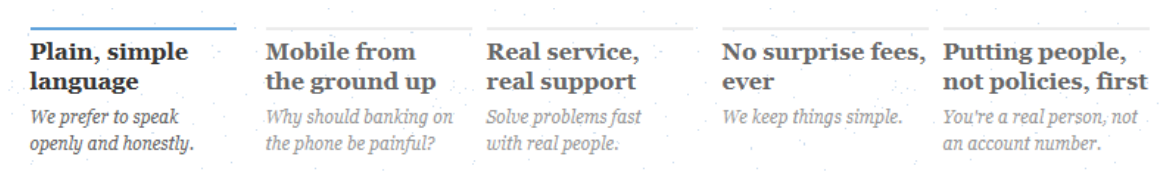


2014

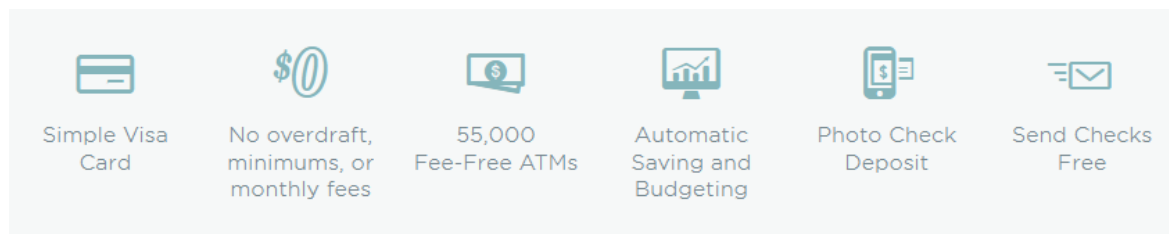


BankSimple.com highlights their reasons to believe near calls to action:

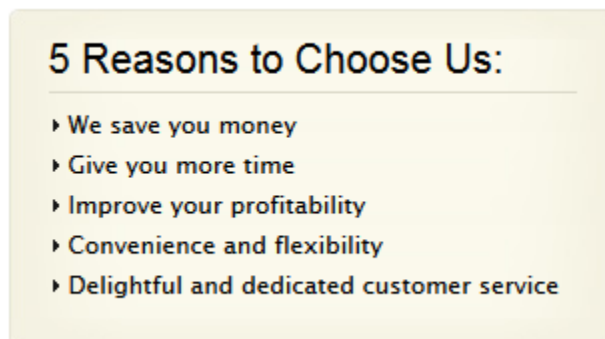
2011



2014



In 2011, **Invoiceera.com** did a great job with reasons to believe on their *Plans & Pricing* page.



In 2014, they took that even further (see next page):

No signup fees. No minimum contracts. No long-term commitments.

Best Value Guaranteed  
100%  
or we will match the price.

MasterCard VISA AMERICAN EXPRESS PayPal 2CO

5 Reasons to Choose Us:

- 1 Unlimited Invoicing
- 2 Affordable Plans
- 3 Rich Invoicing Features
- 4 Customized Invoices
- 5 Delightful and Dedicated Customer Service

Reasons to believe in your company are always a good thing to display in your copy and elevate with strong visual design. Even if you're not part of a price game – if your startup isn't planning on being the low-cost leader – notices of the extra costs you're willing to bear as a company will only do good things for your brand.

For best results, make your reasons to believe as tangible as possible.

## NEXT STEPS

~ APPLY WHAT YOU'VE LEARNED NOW ~

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Review your research to identify the top objections your prospects are likely to have at key stages in your funnel: home/landing, tour, pricing and in-checkout.

Because reasons to believe can help prospects overlook some of their more minor objections, complete the following worksheet to develop a list of reasons your visitors and customers should believe in you. Then, start adding them to pages where objections are particularly challenging and in persistent locations, like your header and sidebar.

## REASONS TO BELIEVE & ASSURANCES

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- ☐ #1 best-selling \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ #1 most-trusted \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ World's largest selection of X
- ☐ The only licensed retailer of X
- ☐ Guaranteed 99.99% uninterrupted service
- ☐ No-questions-asked returns
- ☐ 24/7 customer service
- ☐ Unlimited online storage
- ☐ Used by \_\_\_\_\_ people
- ☐ Over \_\_\_\_\_ completed by nearly \_\_\_\_\_ people
- ☐ Always free
- ☐ We support 1% for the Planet
- ☐ We support [non-profit]

**OTHER:** \_\_\_\_\_

## 9.

### 9 MESSAGING TIPS TOO SMALL FOR WHOLE CHAPTERS

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#### **1. Start with 10x more info than you need, write... and then cut.**

“Overwriting is the key. If you need a thousand words, write two thousand. Trim vigorously. Fact-packed messages carry a wallop. Don’t be afraid of long copy. If your ad is interesting, people will be hungry for all the copy you can give them. If the ad is dull, short copy won’t save it.” – John Caples, Legendary NY Copywriter

The goal is to write, write, write – and then edit yourself. The second half of that statement is just as important as the first.

#### **2. You can write copy in the positive, negative... or both.**

Although most marketing messages are based on the idea of solving customer *pain*, which feels inherently negative, marketing managers want you to write messages in *positive* ways. That means they want you to eliminate negative words from copy, such as:

- Don’t
- Never
- Avoid
- Banish
- Get Rid of
- But

What's weird about the always-be-positive approach is that **we're raised to pay most attention to negative phrases**. When your nephew is about to touch a hot element, what do you say? "Don't touch that!"

A marketer would have you say, "Only touch this."

*Which is more effective?* The negative, you see, can be very powerful. But that doesn't mean negative is *always* better.

The classic Apple "1984" commercial – the one that showed a futuristic drone-filled world and the uber-athletic tough chick rushing through to end it all – was not exactly the most *positive* ad campaign ever produced. Yet it continues to resonate with advertisers and consumers as an important, powerful and unforgettable message that shaped the brand.

On the other hand, Ad Age called Volkswagen's "Think Small" campaign of 1959 – with its decidedly positive campaign message – the top advertising campaign of all time.

In the advertising world and in our startup world, no one has definitely been able to make a case for going either negative or positive in your messaging. In some cases, you may just want to do a hybrid of both, like Miller Lite's classic "Tastes great, less filling".

Positive	Negative
<b>DeBeers</b> A diamond is forever	<b>7-Up</b> The Uncola
<b>Maxwell House</b> Good to the last drop	<b>Crest</b> Look, Ma! No cavities!
<b>Nike</b> Just Do It	<b>M&amp;Ms</b> Melts in your mouth, not in your hands.
<b>McDonald's</b> I'm Lovin' It	<b>US School of Music</b> They laughed when I sat down at the piano, but when I started to play!
<b>US Army</b> Be all that you can be	<b>Charmin</b> Please don't squeeze the Charmin

Every copy hacker has to make choices about the sort of messages she or he wants to put out there. The best rule of thumb here is to avoid negative associations with your brand.

### 3. Don't give your audience too much credit. We're not all geniuses.

We tend to run around believing that everyone's smart and critical and analytical. But the fact is that we all make 100s of 1000s of decisions every day without thinking, and we all blindly accept things as they are simply because it's too much effort to question it.

So don't assume your reader will question everything you say. (Questioning everything is exhausting.) You don't need to explain every statement you write.

#### 4. Keep your offers simple.

Fidelity used to offer reduced banking fees for those customers who kept a certain amount of money in their checking or savings account. It was a good offer, but it was filled with ambiguity:

- *What sort of reduced fees?*
- *What is a "certain amount"?*
- *Is it checking, savings, or both?*

When they simplified that message to **No Fees If You Keep \$400 In Your Savings Account**, their customers in this program **quadrupled** within just 4 months. Succinct + sharp = sales.

#### 5. Copy works best when readers believe it.

It can work to your benefit to write a line of copy that's almost impossible to believe. Long-form sales copywriters do this all the time.

But it's critical to note that a nearly-unbelievable line of copy should never *be* impossible to believe. And you should always support an almost-unbelievable message on the page by giving clear examples that build credibility.

#### 6. Customers *want* a magic button to press.

Although seemingly contrary to the previous tip, it's true that customers want to continue to believe what they already believe that:

- There are miracle cures out there
- They're worthy of those miracles cures
- Those miracle cures will require little effort while saving them loads of time

People have always bought and will continue to want to buy – at least until an apocalypse – anything that will make them younger, sexier, more powerful, richer.

People are willing to believe that you have it.

Don't take advantage of this. But don't hold back if you have a product that will rock their socks off. Roll with the inertia of their desire to believe in the Harry Potter of all products.



**7. If it's in the news *and* related to you *and* you can use it in a non-nasty way, use it.**

One of my clients had the good fortune of their competitor making a major blunder and a national newspaper picking up on it. We decided to leverage that press to our benefit.

Citing the article, I wrote a long-form page (using the “open letter” concept) to lure people away from that competitor, and **we finished the campaign by selling nearly double what we'd forecast**. The long-form helped, but the motivation created by the news item was critical to the campaign's success.

**8. The most important decision you will make is how you position your solution.**

Ogilvy & Mather famously positioned Merrill Lynch not just as a stockbroker but as a total financial services centre and American Express Travelers Cheques not just for foreign travel but for domestic as well.

To determine how to position your product, first recognize that you must position your product... and secondly, do research!

Talk to customers, business contacts, anyone who'll answer your questions.

Be sure you decide on your positioning before you write. It's true that you can always change down the road, but why take that route when you can start on the right foot now?

**9. When writing starts to feel difficult, you're doing it right.**

Thomas Mann once wrote, “A writer is a person for whom writing is more difficult than it is for other people.” Keep that in mind while you're writing your copy. If it starts to feel too easy, you may not be pushing yourself hard enough to select the right word or cut unnecessary copy or position a product for a niche.

Fluff is easy. High-converting copy is time-consuming and hard – but worth it!

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Founded in 2011 by Joanna Wiebe and Lance Jones, Copy Hackers started like most startups: as a minimum viable product that launched on Hacker News.



Nearly three years later, we're pleased to see that the market has validated our idea – and then some. Copy Hackers books are on the Kindles and laptops of over 10,000 startup founders and, based on the emails and tweets we get almost daily, are responsible for helping busy programmers and marketers write higher-converting copy with greater confidence.

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