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Telling Your Story: The First Ten Seconds Are A Make Or Break

By Catherine Franz

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Why do people write long copy? It is not because their readers read it all! People write long stories for the same reason that restaurants that serve big portions get customers lining up at their doors. They are creating the illusion that their meal is cost effective. A long story suggests that there is a lot to say.

The American society teaches that more is better and you are not going to single handedly change that. Instead, go with the flow -- use the illusion and write long emails, long articles, and long sales letters...BUT before you do, make sure there are six questions that are answered in the first ten seconds of your copy.

The questions are: What? Who? When? Where? How? Why?

"What" always needs to come first in every story. "What" must also be part of the headline, subheadline or graphic and needs to dominate your marketing piece. It needs to be simple, fresh, and catchy (not tricky). It must convey what the reader will get for continuing.

"Who" identifies your business. It must tell the reader who is telling the story and it must do so at least twice in your marketing piece. If you use your logo as your "who," it must fuse with the "what" element of the ad. "Who" means more than a name or a logo. Some logos seem to speak to the designer, but mean nothing to the reader.

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If your logo doesn't automatically deliver meaning, then only use it to build your brand. Remember, however, that branding is a time and dollar intensive effort.

"Who" can be conveyed through pictures. A good picture of you, your employees, your office, or your events create a personal connection with your reader. If you offer workshops or seminars, use those pictures. People are more likely to believe a photo than a piece of artwork. If you have been in business for a while, say so "since 1982" counts.

Longevity builds points in the trust category. Be sure to identify with your name and weave that information throughout the entire piece. By the time you are done, your piece should be so closely identified with you that it would be impossible for someone to pirate your words or logo and put them into their marketing piece.

"When" is usually simple to add. It needs to go further down in the marketing piece. Novices place "when" in the topic. If the readers find your information important, they will create the space to attend. If you say it too soon, before it is important to your readers, they may say "no." After your prospects learn what is happening and who is doing it, the next question is "when." At that point, you give days, dates and time. If it is a big event, use the year in the date. All too often, retailers leave their hours out their ads.

"Where" may seem easier than "when." Maybe you are thinking that you just add your address. Not so. Use your imagination for a moment: you are having a party and want a friend to come. You give directions, draw a map, and provide him or her with all the right and left turns.

If your marketing piece requires your customers to find a location, give them complete information. (If you are sending an e-mail, give them a link to an on-line map). Add helpful details like: "look for the blue awning" or "we're across from 'x' restaurant." Be sure to include information about parking. You do not want someone to get frustrated about parking and go home.

"Why" is often overlooked from the prospect's viewpoint. .

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Many otherwise good marketing pieces fail at the "why."
"Why" addresses the importance of the event or the uniqueness of the product.

Don't forget that your prospect is looking for a good reason to toss your information. People have more information today than they can handle. You need a persuasive "buy now" reason in the "why" part. The answers need to tell them why they need to hear/learn about this now.

There are only two powerful "buy now" elements that trigger action: (1) scarcity, and/or, (2) a limited time to act. Either you are going to run out of product or you are doing something for a compressed time.

Before an event there needs to be two or three weeks with

limited (scarcity) offers along the way. Item pricing will not pull an event along, but a good general selection story will. A story like "further reductions" works, but only if it is true. Your prospect will know if you are "fudging" the truth, even if your customers don't.

Your employees, who are your first line of contact with customers, will certainly know. Remember the "going out of business" signs that show up several times a year? Maintain your integrity and your customers will stay your customers.

"How" are your payment or credit terms. Tell your customers about them only after you have sold them on your product or event. Don't yell "one year interest free" or "no payments until July of 2004" until they are excited about what you are offering. Present your special terms after they have decided they want it.

In summary, long copy is a good choice after you fulfill the 10-second requirement of the six W's. This way you allow both "I want to know a lot" and "give it to me fast and straight" to get what they need.

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If The Viewpoint Character Is A Secondary Character, Have You Established Who He is?

By Nick Vernon

Creative Writing Tips -

I have said above that if a secondary character tells the story of the main character, then the spotlight should be kept on the main character.

This shouldn't be taken to the extreme though.

In other words, you don't just write the story of the main character without telling your readers a bit about your secondary character.

Unless the reader understands the reason a secondary character is telling the story, it will seem peculiar that the main character isn't telling it himself. It is, after all, the main character's story.

So, the following have to be answered... Who is this secondary character? Why is he telling the story instead of the main character? What is his connection with the main character?

Weave in some information about the secondary character so we can gain a better understanding of his role in the story.

Besides his passion for writing, Nick Vernon runs an online gift site where you will find gift information, articles and readers' funny stories. Visit

If The Viewpoint Character Is A Secondary Character, Have You Established Who He is?

Creative Writing Tips – Have You Established Your Main Character At The Start?

In Ten Seconds The Bomb Will Go Off And Destroy The City (Tension And Conflict)

Ron Sathoff's Speaker Tips

Using Sara Crewe's Greatest Power in Your Newsletter

The First and Second Adam

HIV/Aids Healed by the Power of God

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