The 5 Cs of Content Marketing Copy

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The following excerpt is from Robert W. Bly's The Content Marketing Handbook. *Buy it now from* Amazon | Barnes & Noble *or click here to buy it directly from us and* ***SAVE 60%*** *on this book when you use code* ***MARKET2021*** *through* ***4/24/21****.*

I love formulas for writing for two reasons.

First, the best formulas are simple, easy to remember and rapidly mastered. Knowing them can help you create content and copy that's twice as effective in half the time.

Second, the reason they became formulas in the first place is

that they work!

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There are literally dozens of time-tested content and copywriting formulas out there. If you don't know any of them, you could be unnecessarily wasting your time reinventing the wheel with each promotion you write. You could also be writing inferior copy that diminishes sales.

One of the oldest formulas – and perhaps the most famous – is AIDA. AIDA stands for Attention, Interest, Desire and Action. It says persuasive copy must first grab the reader's attention, then get them interested in what you're selling, then create a desire to own the product and finally ask for action.

AIDA is one of my favorite formulas – I've been using it to write successful promotions for four decades. Even better, it works just as well for content.

Less well-known than AIDA, but in its way almost as powerful, is the SELWAB formula. SELWAB is a mnemonic device to remind marketers what's most important to the prospect. It stands for "start every letter with a benefit."

Yet another writing formula I use – one I invented – is the "Five C's." It says that every good piece of content is clear, concise, compelling and credible, and has a call to action. Let's take a look at each element of the Five C's formula in a bit more detail.

Clear

Your writing must be clear to everyone who reads it – not just to you or the client or the marketing director or the product manager. There's an oft-quoted saying I like that defines clarity this way: "It's not enough to write so that you can be understood. You must write so that you cannot be

misunderstood."

The typical advice given in writing classes about clarity is to use small words and short sentences, paragraphs and sections. This is sensible, as they make your content easier to read.

But clear writing stems primarily from clear thinking, and the converse is also true. If you don't really understand what you're talking about, your writing will be weak, rambling and obtuse. On the other hand, when you understand your subject matter, know your audience and have a useful and important idea you want to convey, the clarity of your writing will inevitably reflect that.

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Concise

The key point is that *concise* and *brief* aren't synonyms. *Brief* means "short." If you want to be brief, simply cut words until you reduce the composition to the desired length. *Concise* means telling the complete story in the fewest possible words – no rambling, no redundancy, no using three words when one will do.

Compelling

It's not enough to make the content easy to read. It must also be so interesting, engaging and informative that the reader can't put it down – or, at minimum, feels compelled to skim it to glean the important points.

A major reason why so much content isn't compelling is that it's written about things that interest the marketer, not the prospect. Marketers care about their products, their organizations and in particular their "messaging" – the key

points they want to get across to the reader. Unfortunately, readers aren't interested in any of these things. They care about their own problems, needs, fears, concerns, worries, challenges, interests and desires.

As copywriter Don Hauptman has often said, the more your copy focuses on the prospect instead of the product, the more compelling it will be. The product is only relevant insofar as it addresses one of the reader's core concerns or desires.

Credible

The late copywriter Herschell Gordon Lewis noted that we live in an age of skepticism. Simply put, prospects are disinclined to believe what you say precisely because you're trying to sell them something.

Fortunately, there are a number of useful tools at your disposal for building credibility and overcoming the reader's skepticism. Your prospects are wary of salespeople but are more inclined to trust advice from recognized experts in a field or industry. Therefore, you can overcome their doubt by establishing yourself or your organization as a thought leader in your market.

One way to do this is by publishing a lot of content. Prospects distrust advertising but are somewhat more accepting of information sources such as websites, white papers, blogs and magazine articles. Become an active publisher of valuable content in your niche. Communicate your key messages in documents that are published in editorial formats, such as webcasts and white papers. Not only will your prospects find the messages more credible, but these publications will also accelerate your ascent to subject matter expert (SME) status in your niche.

Another obvious but often overlooked means of building credibility is to offer a strong money-back guarantee and

then, when customers ask for refunds, grant them quickly and cheerfully, without question or argument.

Rude, slow, or unresponsive customer service can quickly destroy any credibility you've gained with your customer. In fact, take steps to resolve customer problems beyond what's required so customers feel you personally care about them and that they're getting more for their money than they have any right to expect.

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Call to Action

A call to action (CTA) tells the readers what action they should take and how to do it. These CTAs can appear throughout the text, or you can put them in a box or sidebar to make them stand out. Common CTAs include:

- Downloading a free white paper or ebook
- Registering for a webinar or teleseminar
- Getting a password to access protected content on a website
- Requesting a free estimate
- Asking to get a phone call from a sales rep
- Purchasing a product online from a shopping cart
- Subscribing to an online newsletter

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