

An Interview with Real Estate Copywriter Marte Cliff

Marte Cliff is a successful copywriter who specializes in writing for the real estate market. She joins us today to share her insights into what sets this market apart and what it takes for a copywriter to succeed in this field.

CI: How did you come to be a copywriter?

I suppose it was an advertisement for AWAI that pushed me over the edge. I had always been interested in marketing, loved to write, and had done the marketing for whatever business I happened to be in. But until that point I hadn't thought about doing it for other people.

CI: What drew you to the real estate niche?

I specialized in writing for real estate long before I became a copywriter. I was a Realtor and the owner/broker of my own firm. I had done all of the promotional materials for the firm – and that's probably why I left real estate. Toward the end, I found that I wanted to write the advertising. And then, when it brought in prospects, I wanted to hand all of them to someone else so I could get back to doing what I loved.

Of course, while I specialize in real estate, I enjoy writing for a wide variety of goods and services. I've learned about, and written about, businesses I didn't know existed.

CI: People looking to purchase real estate are often looking to make the most significant purchase of their lives. How does this affect writing to that market?

A lot of people have either been burned in a real estate transaction or know someone who has. Many of them blame the real estate agent, and sometimes rightfully so. This means that, along with outlining what's special about an agent's services, you have to find ways to inspire a good measure of trust with your copy. Remember that real estate is somewhere near the top of the "least trusted" professions, so you do have to counter that.

Realtors are also very bad at asking for testimonials, so you might not have much to work with. Of course, you can push them to ask for more – or get a list of their happy customers and go after them yourself.

It's important to convey the agent's personality. Too many real estate websites look "institutional," and most individuals want to do business with a real person. That's one reason I encourage all of my real estate clients to include an "About me" page on their websites and a small blurb about themselves in brochures. Those allow you to show that the agent is a person outside of the office – one whose interests, hobbies, etc. can give prospects a sense of connection. It plays on that old concept of wanting to be with people who are "like you."

CI: Do you write for real estate agents in any location, or do you work only with those in your region?

I don't work with *anyone* in my region! My clients are everywhere else. They're scattered all the way from California to New York – as well as in Canada and Panama. This is a bonus for me, because I'm learning about real estate practices in other countries and finding it fascinating.

CI: How do you go about learning about a location you are unfamiliar with?

I don't think knowledge of the location is important at all. Your clients will tell you the things you need to know about the market – whether it is up or down. They can also provide you with the reasons why people might want to move into their area.

CI: What kinds of marketing materials do you usually write for realtors – brochures, direct-response packages, postcards, or a combination?

I write a little of everything, but more than anything else, I write Web copy. The National Association of Realtors reports that over 80% of all home buyers now begin their search on the Web, and smart Realtors are realizing that their website needs to stand out.

I also write articles that they can use as "bait pieces" to get website visitors to leave a name and/or to post on their sites to give themselves a boost with the search engines while offering added value to their prospects. My background in real estate helps a lot with that part of the package.

Some Realtors still send postal mail to generate leads, but with the rising cost of postage, this shotgun approach is becoming less popular. However, most mail to their past customers and sphere of influence, so they need good marketing letters for that.

Very few Realtors will want you to write their property ads. Your work will primarily focus on promoting the agent.

CI: What are some of the most important techniques to remember when writing a real estate promotion?

Techniques are much the same as when you're promoting any other product. What is different, perhaps, is the way you'll have to work with your client. Many Realtors don't recognize that they do anything different or better than any other Realtors, so you almost have to pull that information out of them. Sometimes it takes a lot of questions and digging. Also, since many, if not most, deal with any and all types of property, you need to give them guidance on promoting themselves more heavily to the niche they prefer.

When it comes to the "Promise" part of a promotion, many Realtors feel that they cannot make promises, because no one can promise to sell a home immediately for top price or to find a home that exactly suits a buyer at the price they want to pay. Your job is to point out the benefits they *can* promise, and help them present those benefits in a compelling way.

CI: What are the most common mistakes writers make when working in the real estate industry?

Not digging deep enough – not learning enough about the Realtor to make him or her stand out from the crowd. Promoting a real estate agent is the same as promoting any other product: You have to touch people on an emotional level, so you have to

show how that Realtor will make their lives easier. Too much real estate advertising is of the "I'm here, give me money" variety.

Cl: What do you enjoy most about writing for real estate?

Becoming acquainted with Realtors who are at the top of the field – those who are really working at their careers and doing what it takes to reach out to prospects. Helping that kind of Realtor gain more business also makes me feel like I'm helping real estate consumers.

Cl: What recommendations do you have for copywriters who want to connect with real estate prospects but aren't sure how?

This is the tricky part. I've done it through my website, through my e-zine and my blogs, and by making regular article submissions to ezinearticles.com. In my experience, it is the individual agents who will hire a copywriter, not the agencies, and they will come looking for you.

These ambitious agents are searching the Internet for advice, so they read articles, blogs, and websites both for information and to find a person who can help them refine their marketing materials. You need to be there to be found.

[Ed. Note: Marte Cliff is a freelance copywriter who specializes in writing for the real estate industry while also working for a variety of small- to medium-sized businesses and non-profits across the U.S. and Canada. An avid student of SEO, she enjoys writing Web pages and seeing them attain high placement.

Visit her at www.marte-cliff.com, where you can sign up for one or more of her newsletters.]

Published: January 23, 2008

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1 Response to "An Interview with Real Estate Copywriter Marte Cliff"

I am currently taking Joshua Boswell Simple Path to Success. I want to be a real estate copywriter. I am a Realtor and Real Estate Investor. I would like to know if there are others in the AWAI community with this niche.

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