

The Key to Every Copywriter's Success

By Alexander Green

I'm very much looking forward to speaking at the AWAI Bootcamp in beautiful Delray Beach, October 24-27. As a financial writer and investment editor, I can assure readers there is a limitless demand in our industry for high-quality copywriters.

In every business, of course, nothing happens until somebody sells something. In newsletter publishing, that somebody is invariably a copywriter, and often one trained by AWAI.

Twelve years ago, I started off writing both editorial and marketing copy for *The Oxford Club*, the world's largest and most successful investment club. I will speak at length about my experience in Delray.

One of the topics I plan to address is the importance — and the art, really — of reading. Everyone reads, of course, and especially writers. But most of us aren't reading nearly as much as we used to.

According to A.C. Nielson, the average American watches more than 4 hours of TV each day. That's 28 hours a week, or 2 months of nonstop TV-watching per year. In a 65-year life, that person will have spent 9 years glued to the tube. Nielson also points out that 48% of males between the ages of 18 and 34 are regular video gamers. And they play an average of 2 hours and 43 minutes a day.

This is a shame, in one sense. It is through books, chiefly, that we engage with superior minds. People who read regularly think better, speak better, and express themselves more clearly. They understand more and tend to be more interesting.

They are also more likely to be promoted. No single factor correlates more closely with business success than a broad vocabulary. As it turns out, how you dress for work is far less important than how you dress your thoughts.

Wise men have always known this. More than two thousand years ago, Socrates said, "Employ your time in improving yourself by other men's writing so that you shall come easily by what others have labored hard for."

Copywriters, however, need to do a particular type of reading. They need to familiarize themselves with the best that is being written in their particular field, both from a copywriting and an editorial standpoint.

If you are writing in the health field, for instance, you want to peruse the bestselling copy in the industry. But you also want to learn as much as you can about nutrition, diet, supplements, new medicines, new therapies, and the latest scientific studies. When you actually sit down to write, you'll be surprised how vital this information becomes. As you read, you should always collect and save the best of what you discover. Create electronic files to store your Internet readings and actual files for newspaper and magazine articles and printed reports. When you get down to writing copy, you will draw on them often.

If you are writing in the investment field, you will need to spend plenty of time with publications like *The Wall Street Journal*, *Investor's Business Daily*, *Forbes*, *BusinessWeek*, *Fortune*, and *Smart Money*. You need to know what the best financial

analysts are saying and your potential audience is reading. You need to understand a wide variety of financial terms and jargon, not necessarily so you can use them yourself — the more unadorned your language, the better in the craft of copywriting — but because you need to know and appreciate what is being said and why.

I can't overemphasize the importance of reading broadly and deeply. Very few writers have amazing ideas that simply leap from their heads. More usually, events in the news trigger ideas based on past reading. And even then, you will still need to dig in and do still more research, something that is becoming increasingly easy thanks to the Internet and all the free resources available on it.

I estimate that a good copywriter needs to spend 15-20% of his day simply reading in his field. You need to learn to recognize compelling ideas, relevant material, strong evidence, and credible quotes. These are the nuts and bolts you will use to write first-rate copy.

I've never known a successful copywriter who doesn't read intensively and extensively. I can assure you it has been a big part of my own experience in the industry.

When a budding copywriter asked me a few years ago what was the single greatest key to my success, I didn't hesitate. "You may be smarter than me," I said. "You may be more knowledgeable and more experienced. You may be a better writer. But you know what? I bet I can out-read you."

That's what makes the difference.

[Editor's Note: With 25 years of experience on Wall Street as a research analyst, investment advisor, portfolio manager, and financial writer, Alexander Green knows what motivates prospects to act. And how to write directly and effectively to them. That's just one reason why he's been inducted into Agora Inc.'s Copywriter's Hall of Fame.

Alexander Green will be sharing his expertise and the secrets to his success at [AWAI's 2012 Fasttrack to Copywriting Success Bootcamp and Job Fair](#).

AWAI announced last week that the event is officially sold out. But don't worry! If you weren't able to register in time, Member Services has started a waiting list. To be added, simply call 866-879-2924 to sign up and they will do their best to accommodate you, and will contact you immediately if a spot becomes available.]

Published: September 17, 2012

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1 Response to "The Key to Every Copywriter's Success"

Thank you for contributing this article: I really enjoyed reading it.

It is important to have a multi-disciplinary approach toward learning and education.

That way, you encourage the cross-fertilization of ideas.

You can borrow liberally from the arts, humanities, social sciences and even physical sciences.

The key is: synthesis and integration of information that you come across on your reading sojourns.

You must be quick to capture new ideas that you chance upon.

Sometimes, ideas will flood into your consciousness and other times not at all, so you must always be prepared for what you cannot predict.

Archan Mehta – over a year ago

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