

Copywriting Makeovers: Tips and Tricks



There's a copywriting project that can be very lucrative for B2B copywriters. Or, it can be a problem. I'm talking about copywriting makeovers.

There are two common scenarios.

First, you have a client with copy that's already published and they want you to rewrite it to make it better. That's a common request.

A second scenario is they'll have unpublished copy in draft form. So a company may be planning an email campaign, they've written six or seven emails as part of an email series, and they want you to rewrite it to make it better.

These types of projects can be very profitable for you as a B2B copywriter. Or they can be very unprofitable because these types of projects can go wrong quickly. They can turn into something that takes you much more time than you had anticipated and based your quote on. That's disappointing for you and the client.

Let me give you a typical scenario on how these types of projects can go wrong ...

Let's say a client calls you and they want you to edit copy they've already written for a website update. Perhaps they've written the copy for each of the pages in-house. But now, they want a professional like you to go over it and edit it for them.

Well, first of all, what does editing mean? Well, that can create a real misunderstanding.

The client might think you're going to be rethinking the messaging and reorganizing to make it clearer and better. They expect you to create fresh messaging and ideas with the features and benefits, rewrite it all, and strengthen the headlines. And you're going to basically use that copy they've written as raw material and produce great copy.

But you might think editing is simply correcting the typos, sprucing the copy up here and there, and maybe strengthening a couple of the headlines. So you and your client have completely different expectations as to the work involved.

You think it's light editing, but the client thinks it's major rewriting. And if you quote just on light editing, two things are going to happen. First of all, you're going to submit the copy and the client is going to be very disappointed because it's going to look like you didn't do much work on it.

And secondly, you've quoted too low and now you have to do much more work to make the client happy because they wanted much more work done on the copy.

So the project has gone horribly wrong and it won't be very profitable for you.

That's just one of many scenarios where these rewriting jobs can really go off the rails.

Well, in this article, I'm going to teach you how to keep it on the rails and show you how to make rewriting projects profitable.

Get Everyone on the Same Page

It's very important for you and the client to be on the same page with these rewriting projects. If your expectations of the work to be done are different from the client's expectations, you're headed for a lot of trouble.

Now, part of the problem is the vocabulary clients use when they talk about rewriting. Clients will sometimes say that they want you to rewrite some copy they've written or that's on their website.

But sometimes they'll use other terms. Editing is a very popular term. Sprucing up, I hear that a lot. Freshen up the copy. Revise it. Enhance it.

What does that mean exactly? Does that mean a light edit or do they want a major change? I don't know.

One client asked me to do a substantive edit of their copy. That's actually a professional editing term. A substantive edit is a major rewrite and rethinking of the copy.

But if you aren't aware of it, would you know what to do based on the way they described it?

Control the Vocabulary

So my first advice to you is to take control of the vocabulary. Choose some term you use to describe a substantial rewriting of copy and then use that term with the client. I'll give you some ideas ...

You can call it copy rewriting. I think rewriting actually is a good term because it denotes working with the copy and making some substantial changes to it, which is what most clients want.

Copy review and improvement. Copy analysis and rewriting.

My favorite term is copywriting makeover. It engages the imagination. The client gets a sense that you're going to look at their copy. You're going to use what's there, but you're not creating fresh content. You're going to revise and rewrite it. You'll move things around to make it substantially better. The client's copy will get a full makeover.

Use whatever term you want, but I would advise you to avoid the term editing. Some people think of editing as proofreading. Just going through a document and correcting errors and grammar. Other people think of editing as complete rewriting.

Avoid Proofreading Projects

I would actually avoid the type of projects where clients just want you to proofread it and fix up the grammar here and there, because that's not what copywriters do. And they could probably hire someone a lot less expensive than you to do some proofreading for them.

In fact, the only projects I take on in this rewriting category are projects where I can do a full rewrite — where I can look at the copy and really give it a makeover.

Develop a Copy Makeover Program for Your Business

You want to create a rewriting program for your business where you're doing substantial rewriting. Projects where you give your client's copy a full makeover.

Projects where you get an opportunity to change and strengthen the headlines as needed.

Where you're able to change the opening and the leads of the copy to make it more powerful, or you're able to make the copy clearer and more persuasive.

Maybe you'll move content around for clarity and persuasion, or incorporate some additional fresh lines of copy, not too much. You don't want to be in a position where you have to add new content.

Those types of rewriting projects pay well and have a really high value to your client.

And by the way, when I do a copywriting makeover well for a client, I get some of my best testimonials from those clients. They know what the copy was originally and they're just so delighted with the improvement.

It's like having an old room in your house that you never quite liked. And then you have a decorator come in and completely redo it. And then you walk into the room and look around and go, "Wow! This looks fantastic."

Clients often have the same reaction when you do a copywriting makeover. They receive the new copy from you and they think, "Wow. This is so much better."

A Two-Step Process for Copywriting Makeovers

Now, let me give you a recommended two-step process for doing a copywriting makeover ...

#1. Review the Existing Copy and Discuss Improvements with the Client

Let's say you go through the copy and you say, "Okay. I can make the headlines better, and I can shorten the copy and make it clear so it's easier and faster to read. And I can bring out more of the benefits in the copy." So let's say you've identified those three changes you think you can make.

Then you get on the phone with the client. You say, "Mr. Client, I went over the copy you sent me. Here are three things I recommend we do to improve it. Strengthen the headlines. Pull out more of the benefits and explain the benefits more fully. And shorten the copy to make it clearer and more succinct, because right now, it's long and rambling."

And you tell your client that will make a big improvement in the copy. You don't have to be specific with your recommendations. You don't have to suggest what the new headlines are, you simply have to say you're going to improve the headlines.

Now the reason why you do that is so you can be on the same page with the client. You want the client to know what changes you're going to make when you actually rewrite the copy.

And secondly, it gives the client a chance to give you some feedback. Maybe there's a reason why the headline is the way it is. Maybe they've tested that headline before and it actually worked very well for them, so they want to keep it. So if anything like that comes up, the client has a chance to tell you about it. And then you don't face the embarrassment of changing it later on when the client didn't want to change it.

Now, some copywriters put together a little written report on it when they do a copy makeover.

I don't do that because I would treat a written report like a new writing project. I have to make it sound good and present it well. I'd rather just get on the phone with the client, and in 10 to 15 minutes, go over what I found when I reviewed the copy. I'll tell them what I'd like to do to make it better. The client says, "Yeah, sure, Steve. Go for it." And I hang up the phone and I'm done.

A written report of my proposed changes would take too long. And I don't think it's valuable to the client. The deliverable they want is the rewritten copy.

#2. Rewrite the Copy

After you've briefed them on the changes you want to make, then you go ahead and do the rewrite the client agreed to. Then you deliver it to the client, and boom, you're done.

The client knows what to expect. They're not going to be shocked by what you send them. They have an idea of the changes you're going to make. They're usually very impressed by your changes.

You know a lot more than your client. As a copywriter, you know how copy should be structured and what makes for great headlines.

When you do a rewriting job, it's easy to make a lot of significant improvements in the copy that really wow your client. But to you, they're very easy to make. That's what makes rewriting projects potentially very profitable for you.

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Thank you for making this very clear as to how to proceed.

Cher1yl – over a year ago

I have used the services of well trained copywriters from copycrafter on various occasions, and I have never felt disappointed with the quality of write ups, because they carry out deep reaserch on the given topics before writing.

Tony Smith – over a year ago

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