

# Five confessions from a copywriting intern

Okay. The headline was click-bait. If you're expecting the scoop on a Fifty Shades-esque scandal in the workplace – you have been misled. The only submission you'll find here is the written sort.

I'm nearing the halfway point of a copywriting internship with a London-based marketing agency, and short though my time 'in the industry' has been, I've learned a few home truths along the way. . .

## **One: Sorry Jessie J – but it is about the price tag**

Being a professional writer isn't all about artistry. Creative brilliance and killer copy can't be exchanged for food, currency or a Zones 1-3 London Travelcard.

This reality manifests itself in two notable ways.

Most importantly, it means you can't bite the hand that feeds you. Even if a client's feedback on a sample of your written genius is about as useful as an inflatable dartboard, professionalism (and the cost of living) demands that you respond appropriately and considerately.

Writing for money also means that time is valuable. Just how many hours and how much effort can you really afford to put into that ebook/ blog post/ web copy? At what point do you begin to sell yourself (and your bank account) short?

## **Two: Kiss perfection goodbye**

As a result of the issues just stated, you can be sure you'll never be fully satisfied with the work you do.

With time typically against you, and the necessity of writing to a client's taste, you will write things that you aren't particularly proud of... But that get the job done in the time needed, and in a manner pleasing to the people paying you for your services.

There's no shame in being a pen for hire. And undoubtedly copywriters are so much more than this – typically bringing a consultative aspect to

their work – but sometimes things are just more wordcount than wordsmith.

### **Three: Creativity doesn't work 9 to 5**

Whether office-based or freelancing from home, writing vocationally requires discipline and persistence during times of reduced inspiration. In an ideal world, running out of creative steam would mean taking a break...

But copywriting is a vocation of deadlines and last minute briefs. There will be times in which you'll need to be creative when you don't necessarily feel creative. Times in which you'll need to channel your muse when it refuses to be called upon.

In situations like these there's value in the aphorism that a change is as good as a rest...

Changing your routine, environment or writing tools can stimulate (or at least partially rouse) seemingly absent creative energy. Simple acts, like laying aside the laptop for pen and paper, or relocating to the nearest coffee shop (or pub) can provide a fresh creative wind when time is against you.

### **Four: You've got to read to write**

For all the writing that you'll do, you'll probably have to do at least twice as much reading.

How can you pen that advertorial about graphic design software if you can't tell Photoshop from Illustrator, your JPEG from your PNG?

You'll need to read – and then read some more – to get to know your client's business and unique product offering. Undoubtedly this will mean episodic trawls through stale, industry-specific prose – a necessary condition of any copywriting role. This is, after all, what copywriters are paid to do... We find stories in, or retell the mechanical and the mundane in engaging ways.

To do this, we need to know what we're talking about.

### **Five: It's nothing personal...**

The idea that creatives are inherently more sensitive than their analytically-minded counterparts has been around for some time. Whilst the veracity of this is a subject for another article entirely – it's true to say that every writer is (to some extent) precious about their work.

Having your prose picked apart by clients or colleagues isn't particularly enjoyable... Importantly however – it's not personal.

There's no room for Wordsworthian notions of writer and work being one when you're writing for money. (And let's be honest – who isn't?) In the copywriting world, an insult to your work is not an insult to you. For the Romantics, writing may have been a self-involved, "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings", but for the modern day copywriter it's a very un-spontaneous response to an agreed client brief.

Criticism and feedback is a necessary part of the copywriting process; a process focused on achieving set marketing purposes and meeting client expectations. This means flexibility and an openness to critique on the part of the writer.

TL;DR – It's not about you. It's about the brief.