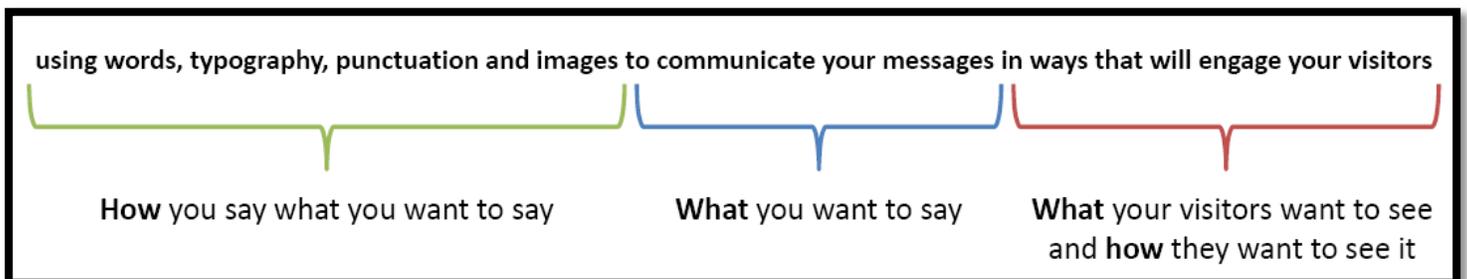


## EBOOK SAMPLE

# Copy Hackers Book 1: Where Stellar Messages Come From (Chapter 2)

## Get to Know Your Customer Before You Write a Word

Writing for the web is using words, typography, punctuation and images to communicate your messages in ways that will engage your visitors. Yes, that's it. I've worked and reworked that statement, and no matter which way I turn it, it fits. If you disagree, please stop reading immediately and accept my apologies for screwing you out of whatever you spent on this thing. If you agree, then let's try looking at that statement in a way we can use, like in this handy diagram:



As you can see, your message can be divided, at minimum, into *What* and *How*:

- **What you say** – Your message
- **How you say it** – The words (i.e., copy) and visual effects that display your message

Getting your *What* and *How* right is usually what professional copywriters do for you.

But let me tell you where the problem can arise with that.

Because copywriters generally focus on turning YOUR *What* – that is, the message you provide to them, whether in an interview or by forwarding your existing copy docs – into their *How*, the resulting copy may get your team totally jazzed.

You may all read the copy and jump around, shouting, “Yes, yes, yeeeeesssssss!”

You’re high-fiving about how *Big Time* you sound.

You’re screaming, “That’s it! That’s exactly what we want to say!”

You’re filling out checks and starting to recruit – preparing for some serious growth.

...But, wait, you do realize that that oh-so-exciting copy may totally tank, right?

It may completely fail to convert visitors. No matter how much you like it.

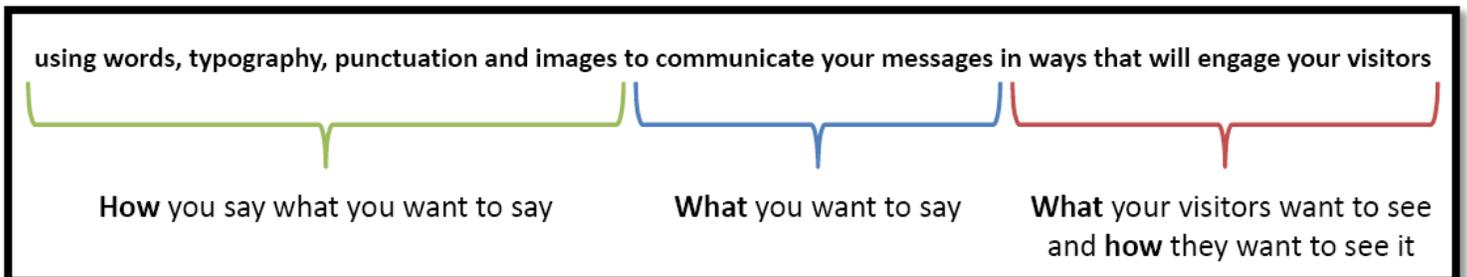
There you’ve gone and shelled out \$250/hr you don’t even have to a freelance writer with great references and an English degree (which I have, BTW, but that’s not the point), and what did you get? You got your messages... *wordsmithed*.

“Wordsmithing” is what junior copywriters and marketing managers think copywriting’s all about. “Wordsmithing” is an insult. You do not want to wordsmith your copy.

### **You want copy that sells.**

You don’t want anyone – least of all yourself – to *wordsmith* your messages. Why not?

**Because what you want to hear doesn’t matter.** Because the tiny clause at the end of that big statement you saw earlier is actually *the most important clause*:



What you say and how you say it mean very little when it comes to writing compelling, effective web copy. **Rather, every message you write needs to be a message your ideal visitors want to see.**

That's why your messages don't come from you at all. Nope, they don't. At least, they *shouldn't*.

You may have a head full of messages that exactly match why you built your product... **but what if the reasons you built it don't resonate with the reasons your ideal customer would choose it?**

Your messages come from people you don't even know yet. They come from your potential customers.

Take some time to think about that, if you'd like. Go put on some tea or stare out the window or whatever it takes. Let it sink in.

Because if you proceed with writing copy based on messages *you* want to say, you're SOL. And I'm not going to let you blame me for the sucky copy you'll produce because you missed this one very important point. So sit with it. Let it sink in.

Your messages come from your customers.

## **Only Research Can Help You Know Your Visitor**

Okay, so you want to figure out who you're talking to and what they want to hear before you write down a single word of copy for your website. Even before you develop your tagline. Great. That's why you start looking for your message by doing research.

Research, research, research.

For most startups, you've done quite a bit of research during the process of developing your prototypes/alphas or producing your minimum viable product/betas. You've probably done user testing, where potential users told you what they liked and didn't like (essentially) about your solution. That research is good stuff.

**But more important is uncovering the information that your potential customers don't even know and couldn't possibly tell you.** There's so much tucked inside their heads that they wouldn't think to tell you. The benefits your product needs to have are woven through every statement they say.

## Find Out Who Your Target Market Is

When building a photo-sharing solution, you may think your target market is the early adopter tech group out there, the ones who'll vote up your "We Just Launched" blog posts on Hacker News. And you may be right. So you may think to target your messages towards tech geeks.

But how long will that market use your site?

And how likely will they be to refer your site to influential people or to the masses?

Ask yourself – and be objective, be hard on yourself: **Do I really know who my target customer is?**

With a little research, you may find that the prevailing users of your photo-sharing site will be teenage girls, teenage "EMO" boys, new moms, and retired women. Will the messages that work on a tech-geek group work on those groups? Unlikely. What matters to those groups? TBD. Once you figure out your primary target market(s), you can delve deeper to find out the details that flesh out these faceless, nameless "markets".

How can you do this research, you ask?

Great question. Here are some ideas for gathering customer intelligence:

- **If you have an email list (i.e., for lead gen, for pre-launch signups), send them a short survey requesting info.** Ask them about themselves... and ask them what interests them in your service. HINT: If you actually ask people to please do you a favor – use the word "favor" – your response rates can increase. Adding "please" can only help. I've seen it. Test it to prove me right.
- **Go out there and TALK to people.** I'm amazed by how frequently startups with zilch dollars think they need to hire a consulting firm to hold a focus group and generate some useless report. Focus groups are, like, 8 people. Can you not go to a coffee shop and annoy 8 people? Hell, you could give 'em all \$25 gift cards for their time and still save tons o' cash vs. actually holding a focus group. Plus, you'll get to have real conversations – and conversations stick much better than a bunch of data in some report. Oh, and let's not forget that focus groups often lead to the very ugly "groupthink", where a dominant personality in the group can sway others to agree with her... leaving you with skewed, useless data. Blech. Not good.

- **Stay in your office and TALK to people.** Okay, to be honest, I don't like going out and talking to people. I've done it, and I'd do it again if I had to. But I'd much rather chat with people online, from the comfort of my own desk. So, if you're like me, get involved in forums. That does NOT mean SPAMing forums – showing up, splashing news about your pending launch, and then high-tailing it. That means listening to what your potential customers are talking about, and engaging them when/if it will be mutually beneficial.
- **Burn your cash and buy a report.** Forrester Research has some pretty solid reports about the behaviors and activities of X markets. But they're seriously expensive. If you've got the moola, go for it, I guess.
- **Save your cash and Compete.** A more affordable solution is to simply get a Compete.com PRO subscription and use their category lists to flesh out any market research you're doing related to website usage.

**You also need to sort through the demographic details for your target markets or segments.** Knowing the vital statistics for your markets, where they live and more can help you break your markets into segments. And knowing target *segments* can really help you shape your language – to get specific (which is always better than generic).

Once you've determined your primary target market (which you'll divide into segments next), start by getting to know them. Learn their key demographic data:

- Age group
- Marital status
- Number of children
- Education
- Annual income
- Average consumer debt load
- Favorite websites
- Favorite pastimes
- Shopping preference: online vs. retail vs. print catalogue
- Tech-savviness

## Next, Narrow Your Market into Manageable Segments

Unless you're planning to disrupt a major existing business – like Expedia or the MLS – you may not wish to try to market to a wide range of people. Instead, you'll want to segment your market to determine whom to focus your energy on.

That is, **you want to choose the segment that will visit your site with the most frequency and be most likely to compensate you in some way for your service** – whether that compensation is actual *money* paid to you or *referrals* paid to you.

These segments are the people you are writing copy for. These segments are the people who are most likely to become your customers.

They may not be glamorous and they may not be rich. But if they have the money to spend on your product and the network of friends to refer to your service, then they are the new cornerstone of your business.

### **Example: Messaging for Moms**

If you're writing copy for your photo-sharing site, and you know your visitors are primarily married young stay-at-home moms without post-secondary education, under \$55K in annual household income, \$20K in credit-card debt, and high tech-savviness, you'll probably steer your messages towards how *affordable* your solution is. And probably steer them away from *ease*, knowing that this market is at ease with technology.

And if you know these young moms generally have smart phones with apps to keep their kids busy in the back of the Dodge Caravan while they drive to and from the grocery store because they can't afford a babysitter, then you might offer a free or low-cost game-style app to win their loyalty. You might even put a link to download that app front-and-center on your home page.

### **Example: Messages for Career-Oriented Women**

On the other hand, if you learned that your primary target segment was middle-aged career-oriented women with low consumer debt, high household income, and a propensity towards spending time on Skirt.com and Oprah.com, would you talk about how affordable your solution is? Not if you want results. In fact, you might adjust your pricing – and messaging – strategy to play into the idea that *high prices equal better solutions* for this group. You might also talk about *ease*, if you learned that this segment was not tech-savvy.

Do you see how knowing your market will shape your primary messages and even your positioning as a brand?

**There are 100s of different messages out there for this reason: each segment has values and motivations that only a few messages will meet.** You can't reach your hand into the grab bag of messages and use whatever you pull out. You need to target *specifically*.

## What Keeps Your Visitors Up at Night? Uncover and Address Pain

At a high level, there are 2 sides to crafting a message:

1. Targeting pain
2. Reflecting motivation, including values

Your product needs to either address and neutralize or eradicate a critical pain for your market or market segment... or to pinpoint one of their key motivations.

**Let's start with pain.** Find out what the pains are that your target customer experiences and that you can solve. Here are some ways you can start to uncover pains:

- Ask yourself, *what keeps my customers up at night?*
- Audit your competitors' sites to see what pain points they hit on
- Use the Google Adwords keyword tool to find phrases that your audience is searching
- Test PPC ads with certain pain points in them to see which get clicked most often
- Monitor people in your ideal customer segment on Twitter and/or in their blogs to see what pains they mention
- Find out what websites they commonly visit

Once you know the pains your customers feel, you can start thinking through how your product/solution benefits address or eradicate those pains. And use that *very useful* information in your copywriting.

### Research: Interview to Find Pain Points

In *Pain Killer Marketing* (2008), Chris Stiehl and Henry DeVries show that 12 to 15 one-on-one interviews will generate about 80% of all possible pain points for your segment. That's the same amount as 7 focus groups with up to 12 participants in each. One-on-one interviews can save you thousands of dollars – with the same high quality of results.

**Now on to the topic of motivation**, which is what great marketing campaigns remind people of and further instill in people. "Motivation" is the driving force behind the actions we take. When a user comes to your site, they are motivated to do so – motivated by forces that live outside the virtual walls of your virtual store.

You cannot create motivation on your site.

But you can – and must! – reflect your visitors’ primary motivation in the copy on your site. At least on your home page. But also across the primary pages in your user flow.

Motivations run deep and are the sort of insights into a person that only their closest friends would talk about. But they’re real for all of us. You won’t necessarily describe motivation in your copy; rather, you’ll want to *reflect* your market’s motivations, like:

- Reclaiming their childhood innocence
- Feeling connected to other people
- Keeping up with the Joneses
- Hosting the perfect family Christmas
- Attracting the person everyone else would want
- *Being* the person everyone else would want
- Never feeling hungry again
- Finally getting respect from their father or mother
- Becoming the ultimate lover
- Guaranteeing their family’s financial well-being
- Protecting their loved ones from predators, including disease and bullies
- Loving what they see when they look in the mirror

Let me better explain motivation on the web with an example. Pretend your name is Teresa, you’re 39 years old and 65 pounds overweight, and you go to JennyCraig.com because you want to learn how to lose weight effectively.

If JennyCraig.com were a site filled with info on losing weight, you’d think Teresa would be in her glory and sign up immediately. But the problem is that her motivation is not to *learn*.

Teresa’s real motivations are to lose weight in order to prove herself against the skinny girl next door (keep up with the Joneses), to attract the ideal partner, to earn her cranky mother’s respect and to love what she sees when she looks in the dressing room mirror.

She skips through all those deep motivations because they’re hard to confess – and she tells herself that she wants a great website with info about losing weight.

But the smart copy hacker knows that, in addition to giving Teresa the info – which a million sites, books and blogs do – you need to tap into her motivations with your messaging.

That said, would you write, “Become the Size Zero You See in Magazines”? No! You simply *know* that Teresa (and millions of women like her) *desire* that... and write useful copy that *reflects* that motivation, like, “Embrace the Woman in the Mirror”.

You might also support that copy with photos of two friends coming out of the dressing room smiling. With testimonials that have real women discussing how they love shopping now. And with rich case studies – video and print – that build on those testimonials.

## Why Are People Coming to Your Site?

For startups, visitors can come in rather specific waves in the early days (i.e., pre-launch and immediately post-launch):

Wave 1: Beta sign-up brings friends, contacts & family; these people get on your email list.

Wave 2: Media gets wind of your beta sign-up site and writes about it, sending specific segments of visitors, such as developers (from HackerNews) and technophiles (from TechCrunch); these people get on your email list.

Wave 3: Your site launches, and everyone on your email list floods your site; many of these visitors like your site on major social networking sites. Other media, likely from more niche sites or even foreign press, drives a range of traffic to your site.

Wave 4: Invitations to try your service, blog posts, and recommendations on social sites bring Lookie Lous.

In each wave, you may have different markets with different motivations. Your friends, family and business contacts in wave 1 may be curious about the basics of what you’re working on; your mom just wants to support you, and your ex-coworker, who’s secretly jealous of your successes, just wants to pick apart your latest idea.

But in both cases, they’re looking for a certain amount of information – and that information is all related to the basics of what you’re doing.

The same may be true for wave 2 people, but they could be looking for more specifics – for the kind of info your mom doesn’t care about. Waves 3 and 4 will see people motivated to learn about your new solution, learn about your company, and – this is the kicker – identify if your solution will solve X pain for them.

Each wave brings with it a specific motivation. Your goal is to ensure you explicitly reflect that motivation in your copy. Sometimes motivation is covered off in your value

proposition; however, depending on the motivation of visitors at key points in time, that may not always be the case. You will likely have to write lines of copy specifically focused on reflecting visitor motivation.

Once people know about your solution – that is, once waves 3 and 4 start – you can begin to work your copy such that it reflects more specific motivations of your visitors.

## Motivation Is Marketing

As I mentioned, you cannot create motivation on your site. You can only reflect existing motivations of your users – and, when you’re really good, build on those motivations.

At its core, “motivation” is created by marketing and PR.

That doesn’t mean that you, as a startup with limited resources, have to go out and do the marketing and PR yourself. Not at all. If you’re competing with an existing solution that is already heavily marketing itself, you can piggyback off the motivation that those marketers are creating.

For example, let’s suppose you’ve created a personal finance management tool. Motivation already exists for such a solution. Big companies like Intuit and major banks have done the heavy lifting of convincing people that they need to manage their money. Television shows like *Til Debt Do Us Part* have added to that motivation. The recession and debt crises (at the time of publication of this book) reinforce that it’s a good thing to watch your finances.

Your visitors are primed. They have a pain; they know that solutions exist.

You don’t have to motivate them anymore than they already are.

All you have to do is remind people why they need *your* solution.

So, to continue the personal finance management example, you might write a callout below your hero section that reads like any of the following:

*Americans who use software to manage their money sleep better at night.*

*Find out where you’re leaking cash so you can save more money & invest in your future.*

*Categorize your expenses! Over 30% of Americans spend \$1400 annually on coffee.*

*Money problems are the #1 reason for divorce in North America.*

(NOTE: When it comes to claims, make sure you have support for those claims. That could be as simple as a link to the Newsweek article where the research was first published.)

If you know the pain you're solving for your customers, you can begin to craft copy that speaks to the very thing that motivated them to go to your site in the first place. This copy will not necessarily convert each and every visitor, but it should at least:

- Confirm that your solution is what they thought it was
- Remind them that they need a solution like yours if they want to solve their problem
- Help them stay on the page longer... and consider your offering
- Get them to begin nodding along with what you're saying
- Move them to the next part of the experience, where you can work to convert them

## What Motivation Is Not

Motivation is not a discount. It's not a limited-time offer. Although your customers may be price-sensitive and motivated to save wherever they can, their motivation runs deeper than that. If you want to write quality copy that keeps new visitors on your site longer, you need to get to the core of visitor motivation – the core of what your solution actually solves.

Motivation is not your value proposition, either. Your value proposition speaks to the unique, highly desirable solution you offer. It doesn't speak to the pain your customer feels.

## Examples of Sites That Cater Well to One Market or Market Segment

The following includes 3 examples of well-known websites that clearly understand their target market segments and have written & designed their sites to speak to those markets.



**SITE:** Disney's ClubPenguin.com

**PRIMARY MARKET:** Children under the age of 9, motivated to play.

**SECONDARY MARKET:** Parents, motivated to protect their kids online.

**WHY IT'S GREAT:** The only copy kids will read is "Play Now" – the picture in the primary real estate is the copy for the kids. The rest is for parents.



**SITE:** PointAbout.com

**PRIMARY MARKET:** B2C in E-commerce, motivated to make money.

**WHY IT'S GREAT:** Appmakr/PointAbout lets companies make their own apps so they can make money – and the copy speaks only to that (and is supported beautifully by meaningful design).



**SITE:** WildFireApp.com (WildFire)

**PRIMARY MARKET:** Marketers in social media, motivated to build their followings in order to make money.

**WHY IT'S GREAT:** Making no bones about it, the copy on this page says exactly what the visitor wants to hear and supports that with easily identifiable social logos.

## **REMEMBER: Your Message Isn't YOUR Message at All**

Your brand and your message alike need to be targeted to the market or market segments that will be most likely to sign up for your service or buy your product. So before you write a word of copy – hell, before you even name your company – you need to think of the expectations of your target market... and align everything you say and do with those.

*If you want to have a real business.*

If you're just killing time and money on a tool that you're going to be able to tell your mom you built – a tool with only your mom as your user base – then forget all of this. Put this book away. And be on your merry way.

I assume that's not what you want, though.

So there you have it – the tough love you need.

None of the words on your page will be your words.

They will be words your customers need to hear.

They will be words that express your customers' pain and reflect their deepest motivations. Which means you need to get to know them ASAP.

### **Learn Low-Budget Market Research from Tim Ferriss**

Tim Ferriss, author of *The 4-Hour Workweek* and *The 4-Hour Body*, is a creative problem-solver. When naming his first book, he bought PPC ads and tested various titles in those ads. The winning ad became the name of his book.

When determining the cover artwork for that same book, he printed out different covers and put those covers on other books in a bookstore – just to see which ones customers gravitated to. The cover that attracted most people became the cover for his book. Pretty effective... and low-budget.

### **NEXT STEPS**

#### **~ Apply What You've Learned Now ~**

Go gather customer intelligence using a survey. This can be an emailed survey, if you have the list to bear it, or a phone survey, or an in-person survey you conduct in a real location. Ask questions that will get people to reveal themselves to you – in terms of demographics, favorite services/products, and motivations.

After you've surveyed at least 12 people, document everything and analyze what you've learned. It's important that you do not try to simply validate your assumptions. Look for new info that will help you *write copy to build your business rather than your ego*. Highlight the surprising stuff and the repeated stuff.

Find your ideal market segments by determining the groups of people who will both:

- ✓ Visit your site frequently
- ✓ Compensate you with cash or referrals/likes

When you have a shortlist of possible segments to target, buy some PPC ads on Google and target them to each segment. The test here is to see which segments click thru. Yes, you'll have to spend some money to get there... but it's money well-spent if you end up pinpointing the single best fit for your business.

**Ready to Learn Even More About Messaging to Convert?**

[Buy \*Book 1\* for just \*\*\\$11.49\*\* \(no tax!\) by clicking here](#)

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