

Writing Tip



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Write less, say more and get results!



Tip #3: Strategic Business Writing: A Powerful, Cost-Effective Marketing Tool

Companies that thrive today realize that as dollars tighten, every word of every email, memo, letter, report, or proposal could also have a financial payback, as well as the less tangible results brought about by clarity and directness.

More and more, successful business people understand that

strategic business writing — writing that gets the results it was meant to get — can be an extremely powerful marketing tool, and certainly one of the most cost-effective.

Here are a few quick tips on what makes business writing — whether we're talking about email, or paper writing — work today:

- 1. Decide what you want this piece to accomplish.** It may be that all you want to do is to provide information, and let the reader decide what to do with that information. Alternatively, you may want this piece to generate an action, or to avoid an action; perhaps to influence, or to change what your reader thinks, or believes.
- 2. Focus on the reader's needs/wants/desires** — Think about your reader. Your reader wants to know "What's in it for me?" "What will happen if I do," or, "What will happen if I don't?" Focus on benefits to the reader. Understand your reader's options.

Tip #3: Strategic Business Writing: A Powerful, Cost-Effective Marketing Tool

Strategic business writing — writing that gets results — can be an extremely powerful, cost-effective marketing tool. Even an ordinary email, memo, letter, report, or proposal has the potential for financial payback, as well as the less tangible results brought about by clarity and directness. Be clear about what the piece is to accomplish. Focus on the reader's needs, wants, and desires. Select content based on his or her need for, and use of, your information, and stay focused on your purpose for writing.

Consider and address his or her real concerns, rather than just what you want to say, if you want to get, and to keep his or her attention.

- 3. Select the items you will discuss** based on your reader's need for the information, your reader's use of the information, and your purpose for writing. If your information does not meet at least one of these criteria, leave it out.
- 4. Determine, and use the appropriate tone** for this specific message and for this specific reader. "Tone" is the relationship that you — the writer — set up with your reader. What do you want that relationship to be? Formal? Informal? Friendly? Helpful? Authoritarian? Professional? No-nonsense?
- 5. Decide on the "take away"** — what do you want your reader to understand, and to remember from this piece.

6. Provide a "call to action." Tell the reader what he or she should do with, or about the information you provide.

7. Aim for clarity, not cleverness.

8. Write carefully, thoughtfully. Make it easy to read. Select comfortable words. Use the best format to make your point. Use active sentences for greater clarity. Keep your average sentence length in the 14-17-word range. Vary the length of your sentences, words, and paragraphs to keep the reader reading: some short, some long, some mid-length. Work with syntax — try moving the words around in a sentence; sentences in the paragraph. Be consistent.

And finally, nothing will destroy respect for a company or organization faster than sloppy, grammatically incorrect correspondence — and that goes for email as well as for paper mail.

Good business writing has generally become more strategic, and a bit less formal than it was at one point. In many organizations, it's now considered acceptable to use contractions; to start sentences with "And," or "But"; to use alternate formats — and even to end a sentence with a preposition if it makes your meaning more clear!

Check what is acceptable in your workplace. Each company has its own personality; its own style; its own way of doing things. Even if there are no company-wide guidelines, your particular boss may have his or her own ideas about how things should be done. Understanding your organization's "ground rules" — the environment in which your writing must work — is a good place to start writing strategically.