THE ULTIMATE SEO COPYWRITING CHEAT SHEET

Get your website copy closer to SEO worthiness BEFORE it gets published.

If you write for the web or oversee the copy development for one or more websites, you’ve surely read plenty of guides, articles and infographics that provide SEO copywriting tips like these:

1. Put your focus keyword into your Title Tag
2. Make your page URL short and keyword-rich
3. Use modifiers to support long tail versions of your focus keyword
4. Get your page title into your H1 tag
5. Include your focus keyword in at least one H2 tag
6. Put your focus keyword into the first paragraph of body copy
7. Make sure your site is mobile friendly
8. Outbound and internal links add relevancy
9. Short copy just doesn’t cut it; the longer the better – but make it high quality
10. Synonyms for your focus keyword and page topic benefit your relevancy and ranking

But tips like these don’t provide a wholesale solution that helps you write better SEO copy for your website that can be applied globally and consistently. If you’re about to embark on a website renovation, you’ll be especially concerned about writing or re-writing copy that will do a better job of getting your pages ranked for search terms your target audiences are using. After all, you want your website redesign investment to be a raving success in the eyes of your organization’s leadership, your users and search engine spiders.

A PROACTIVE APPROACH TO SEO COPYWRITING

Writing SEO-savvy copy before your pages are published is far more efficient in terms of time and resources. Yet so many of us publish our pages of copy first, then optimize it after its been populated and published to the site. What if there was a better way?

There is! Use this invaluable cheat sheet to guide your SEO copywriting. It’s a critical tool for defining your target SEO keywords/phrases for each page of your site. This will ensure your web team has everything they need to populate, publish and optimize your pages. If you don’t go through this effort before the site is developed, there’s a good chance that the web team’s efforts will be strained and inefficient, significantly damaging your SEO results.

This proactive copywriting approach also helps ensure that your review and/or compliance teams see all final copy related to the page. If you hold off on optimizing page copy until after it’s has been approved by top execs and compliance staff, it might be difficult or impossible to get the optimized pages reviewed again in a timely manner and re-submitted for compliance approval.
THE SEO COPYWRITING CHEAT SHEET

You or your copywriter(s) will need to contemplate the critical elements listed below as they relate to your business, website goals and page design. You will need to tailor your copywriting efforts for the specifications of your site’s primary, secondary and tertiary level pages.

- **Purpose of page:**
  What is important to communicate on this page for the benefit of your target audience? This is a useful reference for the writer, editor, proofer and for people who are reviewing and approving copy.

- **Top 3 search terms:**
  These are words or phrases your target audience would use to find this page when searching online. This is a useful reference for the writer, editor, proofer and for people who are reviewing and approving copy.

- **Section title:**
  This indicates where this page will live within the site’s organizational structure. If it is a primary page, it is at a parent level and this field would be the same as the navigation title.

- **Navigation title:**
  This is the name of the page that will show up in your navigation structure/site menu. The Navigation title and the page title are often the same. But not always.

- **Page title:**
  See Page Title Tag in SEO section below.

**HERO**

- **Hero image alt tag:**
  If your page features a large image across the top, below your navigation, this is called a hero image. Sometimes there’s copy on the image. It might be the navigation title of the page, for example. Or it might have a marketing message on it. If so, it’s best if this copy is handled as text, which is searchable by search engine spiders.

- **Hero copy:**
  What should the copy on the hero image say? Hint: keep it short and to the point.

- **Hero call to action:**
  Is there action you want the user to take? If so, write it succinctly. Note if it is a text link and where this text link should take the user.

- **Hero call to action button copy:**
  Will there be a button for that action? If so, what will the button copy say (2-4 words) and where will it take the user?

**BODY**

- **(H1) Body copy headline:**
  This is typically the largest sized text on the page. It tells the user what the page is about and why it is important.

- **Body copy:**
  Minimum 300 words recommended. The bulk of the page’s content will be placed here. Think
about your target audience and what they are thinking, what their hot buttons are and the
language they would use. Remember, you are writing for people AND search engines.
✓ Paragraphs should be short and to the point.
✓ Use conversational tone and wording.
✓ Use business terms as necessary but avoid jargon.
✓ Use active voice in body copy, opposed to passive.
✓ Use a transition word or phrase in at least 30% of your sentences.
✓ Limit sections of copy (between headers/subheads) to 300 words to break up copy.
✓ Try to limit sentences to 300 words or less.
✓ (H2) Subheads work.
  ▪ Subheads break up blocks of copy and convey key points of information succinctly.
  ▪ Lists are great, too, because they:
    o Use bullets that catch the eye
    o Are easily scannable
    o Organize key ideas

Inset image alt tags:
Images, graphics, charts to further illustrate or "sell" your body copy messaging are useful in
drawing in readers and keeping their eyes on the page longer. All images on the page require an
alt tag. At least one of them should contain your focus keyword/phrase (see SEO section below).

Outbound/external links:
Incorporate a text link in your copy that takes users to a page outside of your website...on a 3rd
party site. Consider having that link open in a new browser window, as a rule.

Internal links:
Cross promote additional information within your site by incorporating at least one text link in your
copy that takes users to another page within your website.

CALL TO ACTION

Call to action copy:
Let's assume your visitor has read the entire page of copy. What should they do now? Visit
another page? Fill out a form? Call someone? Go to a physical location? Download something?
Click to purchase? Whatever the next logical step in their journey is, explain what it is and its
benefit to them in a succinct manner here using action-oriented copy.

Call to action button copy:
This is the very short copy to appear in the link or button to take action.

Button destination:
This is where the CTA button takes the user.

BASIC SEO

Page title:
Typically it is automatically generated using this formula -- Primary Keyword - Secondary
Keyword | Brand Name; If you keep your titles under 55 characters, you can expect at least 95%
of your titles to display properly.
Slug:
The page slug is the end part of a URL that identifies a particular page on a website. It’s typically the editable part of the URL that explains the page’s content to users.
- Contains the focus keyword/phrase
- Does not contain stop words (filter out any unnecessary words like “a,” “the” and “and”)
- Is short but descriptive

Meta description:
Your page’s clickthrough rate can influence its search engine ranking. The Meta description is what users see when your page appears in organic search results. (Or what is automatically displayed when a user shares your page via a social post). Put the most important words in the beginning.
- 135 to 160 characters
- Actionable, active voice
- Includes a call-to-action
- Accurately represents copy on page
- Contains the focus keyword/phrase
- Is unique to your site and is not repeated on any other page in your site

Focus keyword*:
- Use it in an H1, H2 or other subheading
- Ideal if it is used in the URL for the page
- Use it in the first paragraph of copy
- Ideal if it is used in the SEO title
- Use it in at least one image alt tag on the page
- Don’t choose the same focus keyword for every page

We hope you find this SEO copywriting cheat sheet helpful as you craft or revamp your website, microsite or landing page copy. You may also find "Is Bad Grammar Killing Your SEO?" insightful as well. If you find the whole process overwhelming or too time consuming, consider consulting with the digital marketing pros at Responsory. We’re here to help!

*The focus keyword or key phrase is the keyword(s) that you want your page to rank for, so when people search for that keyword, they’ll find you. Here's a tool to help you look for keyword/phrase suggestions: https://yoast.com/suggest/