

## HOW TO WRITE QUALITY BUSINESS DOCUMENTS THAT CUSTOMERS WANT TO READ

People rarely pay enough attention to the documents they send their customers, suppliers and others in their business network. How the recipient perceives your organisation will depend largely on these documents. And when this is the first communication they receive from you, it's vitally important to do it well.

Why?

Because you want to be viewed as professional, competent and a good outfit with which to do business.

Communications which are poorly laid out, littered with grammatical and spelling mistakes, or are badly written do not convey a good image. In fact, the reverse.

Do you want to be seen as sloppy, careless and unprofessional? Of course not!

So what can you do to improve your written communications? I have three tips for you, and by far the most important one is this:

**Know your audience and what you are trying to achieve.**

If you don't think carefully about this, you are doomed before you begin. It's like going on a journey. If you don't know what your destination is, how do you know which road to take?

For example, you would write a letter to a client asking for their business in a quite different way to a letter to a supplier asking why they haven't delivered your goods

on time. You wouldn't pepper your communication to someone outside your organisation with the jargon you use with your colleagues. You shouldn't anyway, although you'd be surprised how many people don't give this any thought at all.

So: rule one is – always think about who it is you're writing to and what you're trying to achieve before you begin.

**Put your most important messages first.** The less important can be included further down the copy. The reason for this is that you want to create attention and interest, to make sure your document is read. Give them the guts of the message up front to entice them to read it all. But bear in mind that they may not get past the first few paragraphs – the phone may ring, someone may drop by and they're interrupted – so they might never get to the end.

**Write concisely.** Do not use lots of extraneous words even if you think it's cute or it will help. It isn't and it won't! So, take care to keep your sentences as short as possible – aim for 25 words. Each paragraph should be no longer than two sentences and should contain only one idea. And, never use a long word when a short one will do. You want people to understand you, not be put off by you.

Don't expect to be able to produce useable copy in your first attempt. In order to hone your communication, you will need to make quite a number of changes. It is always a good idea to let other people check your writing. I heard recently of flash invitations sent out for a function launching a new newspaper which, after they had all been mailed, were found to have a serious defect. Be 100 per cent sure that you're happy not only with the words, but the colour and the layout, before your document goes to the printer. It's too late to change once it's printed.

My advice to anyone attempting their own communications work is simply this: think what it would be like to receive a piece of communication from you. Is it appropriate to the audience? Does it get your message across in a professional and accurate manner? Write it so that they will want to read it. If you do this, it will make a huge difference to all your communications.

