



Performance Management Group, Inc.

Business Management Consulting
Professional Development Training & Coaching

SECRETS TO SUPERIOR PERSUASIVE WRITING KEY POINTS

INTRODUCTION

- Superior persuasive writing, whether for marketing or technical applications, is a process.
- Because it is a process, every individual step, and the sequence of those steps, are important to achieving the desired outcome.
- Differentiation, organization, and the manner in which you express content will influence outcomes far more than grammar and sentence structure.
- Very few firms exhibit superior writing skills, thus this capability alone provides a significant opportunity for differentiation and competitive advantage.

THE PROCESS

1. DEFINING YOUR MESSAGE AND SUPPORTING CONTENT

- A written document, including all proposals and reports, should have only one message regardless of the number of topics it addresses.
- The message is used to differentiate your firm, and it should be expressed as a benefit. Translate features to benefits by asking “So what?”
- The message is the common thread that must be woven throughout the document and reinforced with every topic addressed.
- This planning step does not need to be time consuming or complex, but it is critical.
- The Pareto Principle applies, where 80 percent of the benefit is generated from the first 20 percent of the effort.
- Support the message by identifying the specific content that will be communicated.

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2. EXPRESSING THE CONTENT

- The content must be well organized and presented in a manner that is consistent with the single message.
- Present benefits first, followed by enabling features. In most cases this will require flipping the normal order of sentences and phrases because most people think, talk, and write in terms of features.
- If you fail to present the benefits there is a high risk of the client drawing the wrong conclusion from the cited features.
- Trigger words, which cause a preprogrammed behavior, are helpful to use as the linkage between benefits and the enabling features. The trigger word “because” will tap into additional persuasive power.
- Use powerful images and stories to help convey your content.
- The use of carefully selected images helps to influence the initial emotional response and align it with the desired outcome. This is because images trigger an emotional response ten times faster than a cognitive response can be generated from processing written information. People tend to form opinions based on emotion then justify those opinions with a supporting rationale. Thus, it is difficult to sway someone’s opinion once it is formed.
- Use images that convey information which is consistent with your message. For example, if you are communicating the firm’s ability to design interiors that encourage collaboration, the images should show people working together rather than an empty space.
- Stories add credibility, make the document more interesting to read, and assist with unaided recall.
- All people are driven by only three things: gaining status or extreme economic benefit; what’s good for people; or meeting requirements. Express content using the Receptor-Oriented™ approach, in which all three receptor types are addressed in the order stated above.
- Segregate results, conclusions, and recommendations, remembering that results and conclusions are factual, and recommendations are opinions.



3. FACILITATING EASY REVIEW

- Clients will appreciate it if you make their job easier.
- Focus on key points of significance and do not imbed important facts and findings among insignificant information. Reduce or eliminate useless noise.
- Change the format to use only 2/3 of the page width, left justify text, and use a serif font. These steps reduce reader fatigue.
- The Executive Summary must be concise, short, and focus on information that supports decision making.
- Although bullets are not recommended for presentations, they are very effective when used in written documents. Bulletize information rather than placing lists of items in narrative paragraph form.
- Wherever possible, translate text to graphics.
- Use good information design principles for placement of key information on a page. Heat maps provide an indication of how the human eye moves on a page. You can influence eye movement with images and faces.
- Leverage both the psychological and physiological impacts of color. Choose a color palette that supports the message.
- Simple errors can undermine technical credibility. Pay particular attention to consistency, and common errors such as significant figures and plural and possessive words. Avoid using words that increase liability exposure.

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