

## What Comes First -- The Copy Or The Design?

Good question. And just like the old chicken and egg dilemma, there's no right or wrong answer. But there's one thing that's certain -- *copy and design work together*. You can't have one without the other.

For example, what do you picture when you hear, "Nike: Just Do It?" Maybe you see the ubiquitous "swoosh" known as the Nike logo. Maybe you picture a close up of Michael Jordan's Nike high top sneakers as he makes a jump shot. The point is this: you picture *something* when you hear the words. Pictures help words come alive. And when they come alive in the mind of the reader or listener, they leave an indelible mark known in advertising parlance as "branding."

The same is true with Web sites. But the branding is two-fold. You don't just use words to brand your name, product, or service in the eyes of the viewer -- you repeat certain words throughout the text so you can brand yourself in the "mind" of a search engine like Google (this is known as search engine optimization). The Web site text *must* work with the graphics, layout, logos, and pictures to be effective.

Here are seven things to keep in mind when working with copy and design (or copywriters and designers):

1. Make sure your designer (graphic designer, Web designer, layout manager etc.) and copywriter have access to one another. Forget being the middle person -- give them the autonomy to communicate with each other. It's imperative to the success of your marketing materials that they're on the same proverbial page.
2. Less is more...*sometimes*. It all depends on the medium. For billboards along highways, you'll want a powerful design and seven to eight words max. For Web sites, you'll still want a strong design, but you may need 400-600 words to be "effective" from a search engine point of view.
3. You'll know that the design and copy are working well together when you don't mind reading the text -- even if there's a lot of it. Because statistics show that the 400-600 word count is important, it's up to the designer to take the text and place it on the page in a creative yet readable way. Not an easy task. A good copywriter will allow for natural "breaks" in the copy -- places where graphics or pictures can be inserted or a customer testimonial may be interspersed.
4. If your designer recommends a copywriter or your copywriter recommends a designer, follow-up on the recommendation. You'll get two people who enjoy working together and who probably produce their best work together. The copywriter/designer team is reciprocal. One often acts as the other's muse.
5. Go with your gut. Yeah, your designer might be the "expert," but if you hate a color scheme or layout, let the designer know. Same goes with the copy. If it doesn't *sound*

right to you, it won't sound right to your customers. Be honest up front. Good designers and copywriters will want you to be happy with their work.

6. At the same time, trust their judgment. Listen to your designer and copywriter's reasoning. If they can provide a solid, simple argument about why something should be the way it is (and if *you're* convinced), go with their recommendations. Remember, you hired them for a reason.
7. Have fun. Working with designers and copywriters should NOT be a headache. By nature, designers and copywriters are fun, creative people. Pass on the moody, attitudinal ones. Life's too short. Even in business.

**END**