

How to Build a Web Copywriting Portfolio FAST

By Sid Smith

I'm not a very good liar by nature ... apparently my mother did something right.

So, when I decided to become a copywriter, I immediately called people I knew. Being good friends, they referred me to business people they knew who needed help with their copy.

I was beside myself with visions of a seven-figure income. Until, that is, I got "the question" ...

"Can you send me some samples of your work?"

OMG. I froze.

The first time I was asked that, I pretended to get really busy for a few days and ignored the email ... not the best way to market yourself as a professional. I felt like a total idiot.

Finally, I got up the nerve to say, "I'm new and I don't have any samples."

Either out of sheer desperation or terminal niceness, they hired me ... at a substantial discount, of course. But, hey. It was work, and now I'd have "a" sample.

Things worked that way for several months until I had an actual portfolio I could send people. The irony is that I hardly ever get asked for samples anymore, and I believe there's a really good reason why.

The thing about having a portfolio is that it's as much for YOU as it is for prospective clients. The best clients don't ask for samples because they already know about you and your work from other clients with whom you've worked.

Build a Portfolio, Become a Better Copywriter, and Make More Money

Building a solid portfolio is as much about building your confidence as a copywriter as it about having something to send a prospect when you're just starting out. The challenge for everyone new to copywriting is how to build your portfolio as quickly as possible.



Here's a simple 4-step formula I used when I wanted to do more internet marketing consulting. This is an extremely fast way to build your portfolio as a web copywriter ... and the best part is that it's also a good way to land some new clients! (Not to mention REALLY honing your skills fast)

1.

Get a list of the fastest growing local businesses.

Invest a few bucks in the Business Journal Book of Lists (bizjournals.com/BookofLists). Get the downloadable version – it's easier and cheaper.

This little gem will give you a number of lists you can use to find local businesses. They list the fastest growing (my favorite), top 100, and will list all the top businesses by industry. They'll give you the web site URL, mailing address, and even a contact person or two. Nice.

2.

Pick a few businesses from industries in which you have some expertise.

While this step isn't totally necessary, the fact that you have some expertise in that industry will help. For example, I wouldn't select a business that sells maternity clothes. While I could eventually write some darned good copy, what I'm looking for here is SPEED, coupled with effective writing.

3.

Re-write their web copy and critique the entire site.

This is the critical step. What I like to do (because I'm a techie at heart) is to download the entire web page into a WYSIWYG (What You See Is What You Get) software program called "Coffee Cup HTML Editor."

It's a one-click process to download the ENTIRE code for the site, and I can then edit the page in software that works just like MS Word (I don't have to know HTML). Then, I'll "show" them their web page completely redone.

But don't worry ... you won't have to do any of that. Just copy and paste the web copy into Word and edit from there.

Put together a "Before and After" page and add it to your portfolio as a sample of your work.

Now, add to that page some specific suggestions on how this company can improve their site. Focus on two aspects:

1. How can they improve lead generation (capturing visitors)? Most companies don't do this at all.
2. How can they improve their conversion rates (converting visitors into buyers)?

And ... voila! You've got a portfolio with samples of your work!

4. **(Optional). Write a letter to the company.**

This is where it gets a little scary. Write a letter to the company (preferably the marketing person) and explain that as a web copywriter, you routinely examine business web sites to hone your skills. In your examination of their site, you noticed some things that could improve their sales.

Then, offer a couple of ideas, no strings attached. You're not selling yet ... just building a relationship.

I've landed some nice clients with this technique. You run the risk of offending the marketing person, but in my book it's well worth that risk.

How to Dramatically Improve This Process ...

The VAST majority of business web sites have lousy copy. They're designed by graphic designers who care more about how it looks than making sales. Or, they're designed by a marketing pro who's never written a lick of winning copy.

You get to step in, become an immediate hero, and build your portfolio in a matter of weeks, not months.

I can honestly say that I NEVER would have had the confidence to tear apart and rebuild an existing website without first studying Nick Osborne's *Copywriting 2.0: Your Complete Guide to Writing Web Copy that Converts*. It saved me hours upon hours of time, and gave me the confidence I needed to tackle website after website.

Do yourself a huge favor. [Get Nick's program](#). Then, get out there and write some copy!

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20 Responses to "How to Build a Web Copywriting Portfolio FAST"

Sid, thank you.

Portfolio building seemed like scaling a mountain... now I see that it is really a hill.

Coffee Cup sounds perfect. I'll definitely check it out.

Thanks Sid.

All the best,

Dan

Dan Elman – over a year ago

Sid,

GREAT Article! Super Simple, doable, but effective idea!

Thank you for sharing this with us.

Best Wishes and Success,

Sophie

Sophie – over a year ago

Suggestion #3 above is very good.

As is the rest of the very helpful advice contained above, especially for newer copywriters.

Following the above advice, will help you, without any shadow of doubt, not only get more clients quickly, but also will help you to build up a portfolio complete with samples very quickly.

Many thanks Sid for posting up this information!

Best regards.

Mark Andrews IMCopywriting

IMCopywriting – over a year ago

Terrific suggestions & inspirational, too. Thanks, Sid!

CareTer – over a year ago

I agree...super helpful information toward making this mountain a molehill. Enough floundering. Will get it done now.

Thanks again, Sid.

Cyndee Davis O'Cavan Copy

Cyndee – over a year ago

However, be sure to read Bob Bly's latest Direct Response e-newsletter for a great description of how NOT to approach a person about their website! (If you're not a subscriber, it should be posted here soon: <http://www.bly.com/archive/>)

Jennifer Wenzel – over a year ago

Fantastic advice, Sid! I cannot believe I missed this article when it first came out.

Thank you!

Kellie Craft – over a year ago

Excellent advice! I'm about to relaunch myself in a new niche, and this is the kind of information I really need.

Susanna Perkins – over a year ago

I missed this one too. . .I can't believe my luck to FIND it now!

AmyODonnell – over a year ago

I'm just starting out as a copywriter, and this is great advice. Not only do you provide an idea I've heard before on how to bulk up your portfolio (re-writing a business site with superior copy), the software you recommended should make that process a lot easier.

Guest (Stephen Bollich) – over a year ago

Can you recommend an html editor like Coffee Cup that is OSX compatible? This article has some great advice, and downloading the code of an existing site for a "before and after" is something I'd love to try.

artzbizz – over a year ago

Do you charge for rewriting the site, is it pro bono, or are you just keeping the file for yourself?

This seems to be a great technique to build a portfolio. I'm excited to get into the web side of copywriting!

Rod Waynick – over a year ago

@artzbizz: Sorry, I have no idea about OSX. I have an iPad and iPhone, but still use Windows on my PC.

Rod: I kept the files for myself to use as samples. Now, I use real clients and no longer need the other samples.

Sid

Sid – over a year ago

Amazing article, Sid

Re: your actual copy skills, is this something you already had and so knew how to do? Or did you need to do a course?

Skills as in everything AWAI promotes, I guess, like headlines, effective copy, optimizing a page...

Thanks for any advice,

JC

Guest (Jon C) – over a year ago

JC - As the saying goes, "Please do not try this at home." Definitely get training. I completed the AWAI training first so that I had the confidence to approach clients.

Sid – over a year ago

I purchased the AWAI accelerated program about 2 years ago. I did what it says 80% of people do and that's store it somewhere.

Well, I've recently decided to dust it off and am now working through the program and the exercises.

I have lots of experience writing, but very little copywriting and this article will help a great deal. Thanks Sid.

Regards, Russ

Russ – over a year ago

Sid - I like fresh original ideas. Your suggestions in this article are quite unique - especially for those of us starting new careers and working on creating new niches.

Cheers!

CarolinaCopywriter – over a year ago

I wish I had a dollar for every deal that I have closed in my sales career. Every sales job that I've worked, within my first year, I am the top producer. I've been to many sales seminars and trainings and by the end I leave thinking: I could've taught that. I'm interested in Copywriting to share and profit from my skills. I've made a lot of money for companies and now I want to make a lot of money for me. Once I learn the ropes, watch out Copywriting Industry. Ron, The Closer, is in the house.

Ron - The Closer – over a year ago

I've done some of this creating fictional examples. My question is how to present them, whether as samples on my website or when sending them to a prospect. Is it unethical to not say it's a fictional example? Does it hurt my credibility give samples that weren't really done for a client? Thanks!

Christen – over a year ago

Thanks for the sweet thoughts and also keep your job up, I wish you the best Much Love PS I am trying something new

Guest (Annette Smith) – over a year ago

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