Want More Clients? Harness the Pebble Effect

By Will Newman

Ryan's voice was remarkably clear on my Skype headphones. As clear as if he was calling from down the street and not 8,000 miles away in Thailand.

Ryan – the executive director of a small microcredit foundation in Thailand – called to tell me the fundraising letter I'd written was doing far better than he had expected.

But this story isn't about that letter's success. The story is how I got there in the first place. How I landed my first paying fundraising copywriting job.

I landed this fundraising job because I'd tossed a pebble in a pond.

The Pebble Effect and Your Copywriting Success

Let me explain. Ten years earlier, I'd started working with a new client – Ryan – whose small Internet start-up sold software products for PCs.

I hadn't written web copy before. In fact, web copywriting was in its infancy. And Ryan had never used a real copywriter. He'd tried to go it alone.

I started with long-form copy. Ryan liked what he saw. When we were about to put it up for the first time, he asked what I would charge to shorten what I'd written to test it against the long copy.

A "smarter" copywriter might have seen this as an opportunity to make more money right then. Which it is. But since I was new at what I was doing, I told him I wouldn't charge him anything for making the changes. Or for the four other versions I offered.

Two versions of the copy did extremely well. When it came time for new copy, you know who he turned to.

As his company expanded – and later when he diversified his products – I was his go-to copywriter. I worked steadily with him until he sold his companies off two years later. The new owners decided to use their in-house copywriters. So I lost contact with Ryan.

So that brings me back to the next time I heard from Ryan. He had started a nonprofit microcredit foundation in Thailand too. He wanted me to write a series of fundraising letters.
After 10 years, he'd remembered me. He had no idea at the time that I was interested in breaking into fundraising. But the extra time and work I'd put in with him on earlier projects had caused a ripple that led to my first paying fundraising job.

It boils down to this: When you're first writing, your goal should not be to make as much money as possible. What you want to do is develop a strong, lasting relationship with your client.

You want to throw a pebble in the pond because you truly will never know where the ripples will lead. And that pebble really is nothing more than using everything you're learning about wisely to benefit you and your clients. Here's how I see it working.

**Always over-research**

The starting place of good copywriting is doing lots of research. More than you'll need in the final version of your assignment. This extra information is never wasted. It becomes a stockpile you can use to build your relationship with your client.

The standard line given to beginning copywriters to encourage them to over-research is you can always use the extra information for another assignment. I have a better use for it.

**Give it away ... or at least some of it**

Bundle this extra information in neat packages for your client. Do this and you increase your chances dramatically of getting another assignment from him. He will remember it.

What could you give him that he'll find useful? Here are a few suggestions from what I do for first-time clients:

1. **Headlines:** After culling your long list of headlines down to your five absolute best, send them all. I'm not the only copywriter who does this. John Forde does it regularly.

2. **Multiple versions:** You've put a lot of effort into writing a strong, 12-page letter. Offer to cut it down to a 6-pager. And then really get out the knife and pare it down to 2 pages. A little extra work for you, to be sure. But you'll rack up points with the client when you offer him these additional letters to test for no additional charge.

3. **Premiums:** In all the research you've done, there's enough extra information you can rewrite and repackage as a special report. Write one for your client at no charge. And if he wants more, offer to do them at a "discount." (But charge enough for them so you don't feel you're giving your services away.)

4. **Graphic design:** AWAI has an outstanding graphic design program for copywriters. You don't want to give away designing a full magalog promo, of course. But when you offer to write a premium, offer to do the layout and design as well. Or offer to do other design elements for the letter or website.

5.
Become a marketing guru: In learning to be an A-level copywriter, you're also learning a lot about marketing. Use your knowledge to guide your client in decisions he might be uncomfortable with.

For example, I had a client who was stuck on using 30-day guarantees. He was beset by too many returns. It took some work, but I convinced him to try Michael Masterson and Jay Abraham's strategy of offering long-term guarantees (even lifetime) as a way of reducing returns. It worked. After that bit of advice, I became a valuable part of their marketing team … instead of "just a copywriter."

These are just five examples of giving your services to a new client that will help cement a lasting, strong relationship. When I've talked about this concept before, I've been asked, "Won't your client expect this from you all the time? Won't he take advantage of you?"

Certainly, some clients will try. But when you offer these extras, be honest with your client. Tell him something like: "I want to write a premium to give away with your product. I normally would charge $100 for this, but since we're building a new relationship, I want to show how much your business – and your business's success – means to me."

Copywriting is a huge industry. But in many ways, it's also like a small town. Reputations spread quickly. If you go the extra distance for your client – if you toss a pebble into the pond – you never know where the ripples will travel and what you'll gain. Those ripples may even travel as far as a microcredit foundation in Thailand.

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