

What Clients Look for in a B2B Copywriter

By Steve Slaunwhite



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Imagine this scenario ...

You get an email from a prospective client. She's the marketing director of a small software firm in town, and she's looking for a B2B copywriter. Yeah! So you schedule a phone meeting. A couple of hours later, you've got her on the phone.

At this point, there's about a 35% chance you'll get the project. How do you increase those odds to 80% or even 90%?

Answer: Know what clients like her are looking for in a copywriter.

You see, marketing directors hire freelance B2B copywriters based on fairly predictable criteria. So if you weave the right messages into the conversation, you will significantly increase your chances of getting the gig.

What do clients want in a B2B copywriter? Here's my take:

1. Good B2B writing.

Obviously, clients want you to be a good writer. They want you to be able to put words together in a way that's clear, engaging, and — most importantly — persuasive. That's a given.

But in the B2B world, you need to go a big step beyond that. You need to be able to communicate effectively to a *business* audience. After all, there's a big difference between a consumer buying a sofa and a warehouse manager purchasing a fleet of forklift trucks. Business buyers make buying decisions differently.

Writing copy and content that motivates business buyers requires a unique set of skills, insights, and best practices. If you don't have those in your toolkit yet, acquire them. Study B2B marketing materials. Read good articles on B2B copywriting. Take a course.

Believe me. B2B marketing directors can tell the difference.

2. Project expertise.

A marketing director needs to feel confident you can do a great job on her project. If she's talking to you about writing a white paper, she's going to become skittish if you need to ask, "Ah, what's a white paper?"

However, she'll become infinitely more confident if you say, "The ideal length of a white paper is around eight pages. Is that the length you're envisioning for this project?"

That question shows her you know what you're doing.

So when talking to a potential new client about a particular project — a white paper, a series of emails, a case study — be sure to get across that you know how to write it, professionally.

If you have a portfolio sample, that's ideal. Send it before the meeting.

3. Ideas and advice.

The best B2B copywriters I know are also good consultants. That doesn't necessarily mean they offer a formal consulting service. Most don't. But they do position themselves as a source of great ideas and advice.

For example, I just got off the phone with the CEO of a small software firm who is looking to get some promotional emails written. Instead of just asking him for marching orders — "What do you need written?" "How many emails?" "How long?" — I instead offered to share some ideas on how to make his campaign more successful.

He was thrilled.

So when having that first conversation with a prospective client, look for opportunities to contribute ideas and share your expertise. Be a consultant, not a temp employee.

4. A "take the ball and run with it" attitude.

What B2B marketing directors hate — *really* hate — is the copywriter who needs a lot of hand-holding and direction. No client wants to work with a high-maintenance freelancer. Instead, clients want to partner with a professional who knows what they're doing and will "own" the project.

One of the easiest ways to demonstrate that is to have a well-defined process. For example, if the project is a case study, you can say to the client, "Our first step is to have a phone meeting to discuss the details of the case study. Then I contact your customer to schedule the interview. Then I prepare interview questions designed to pull the most captivating story possible from your customer ..."

When you talk like that to a B2B marketing director, you're basically saying, "Relax. I've got this." And that's exactly the impression you want to convey.

5. An interest in the project's success.

There's an old saying in marketing. "People don't buy the drill. They buy the hole the drill makes." In other words, results.

The same is true of B2B copywriting. Yes, a marketing director may want a new blog post written twice a week. But what she really wants is a blog that engages her target audience, heightens their interest in her company's products, and nudges them toward making a purchase.

As a copywriter, you can help her accomplish that.

When discussing a potential project with a client, ask questions like, "What are your goals for this blog?" "How will the posts be used in your other sales and marketing initiatives?" "What types of prospects do you want to engage most with this blog?"

Show an interest in your client's success.

6. A good experience working with you.

When a prospective client is meeting with you, in person or on the phone, one question she silently asks herself is, "Will I like working with this person?"

B2B marketing managers deal with a multitude of freelancers, consultants, firms, and suppliers to keep their marketing programs humming. The last thing they want is an unpleasant experience working with someone. So, when chatting with a prospective client for the first time, give them every reason to expect they're going to like working with you. That you're the B2B copywriter they've been looking for.

How do you do that? Be friendly. Be positive. Contribute ideas. Smile. My friend John, a management consultant, says, "Be the person you'd want to work with."

So, there you have it. Six things clients want in a B2B copywriter. Keep those things in mind when meeting with a prospective client and you'll stand a much better chance of closing the deal.

Your takeaway for today: Follow these six guidelines Steve put together and pretty soon, you might just find yourself writing B2B projects and getting paid regular fees.

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