



AWA

How to Use a Copy Review to Increase Your Conversion Rate

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Introduction

Do you ever look at your web copy and think it could work harder for you?

You're right. Copy – the words used on the website to help funnel customers through the buying journey – plays a critical role in Conversion Rate Optimisation. However its importance, and potential to increase online sales, is often overlooked.

Copy has a different role to play at each stage of the customer journey. When visitors enter the funnel, the aim is to quickly inform and excite about what the website has to offer them, establish trust and encourage them to stay and find out more.

As they move through the funnel, copy needs to hold their interest and guide them to take the desired conversion steps. Finally copy needs to make it easy for the customer to buy whatever they have chosen, and feel confident and secure while they do it.

So how do you evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of your current copy and harness its potential to improve your online sales?

One technique is to conduct a Copy Review; it's a powerful technique which can reveal how well your copy is optimised for conversions (rather than search engines).

From this insight and understanding, you can set standards for future copy to ensure it contributes at full strength towards higher conversions.

This guide gives you step-by-step instructions for conducting a Copy Review, and explains two stages of a Copy Review – the Copy Audit and the Copy Specification – as well as sharing some useful hints and tips about copy writing. With case studies and real life examples, you will also discover how Copy Reviews have been used by AWA digital to increase conversion rates.



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What makes good website copy?

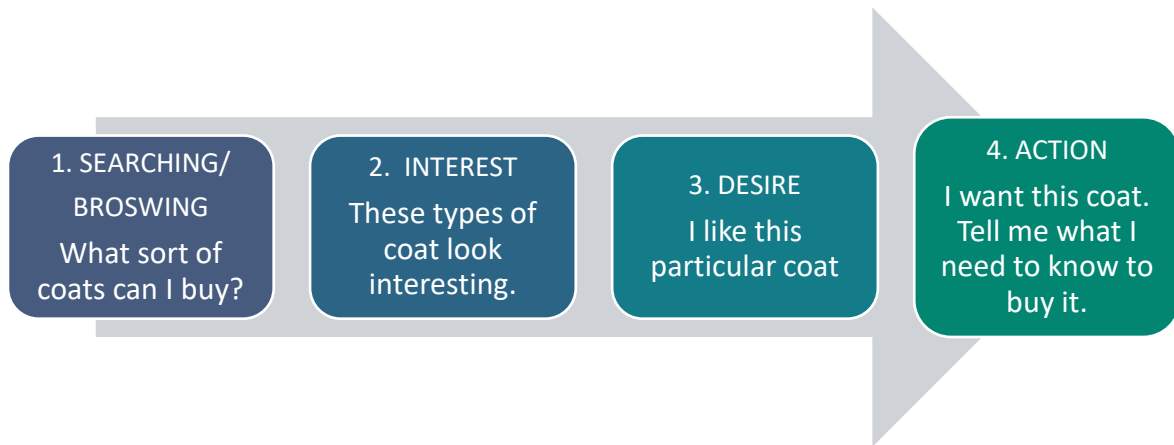
Copy is your silent salesman, the bridge between the product or service you are selling and what your potential customers want to buy. It also adds to the user experience by setting a tone of voice for your website that reflects the brand personality.

Naturally, copy should be optimised for search engines, but it also needs to be optimised for human beings. There is no point in having Google send lots of people to your site, if the copy doesn't entice or enable them to buy once they get there.

Effective copy:

- speaks directly to customers in a way that is engaging
- appeals to them as an individual
- gives all the information a customer needs to make a purchasing decision
- In order to make this information compelling, benefits should be presented, not just features.

Unlike other forms of writing, such as blogs or articles, web copy needs a structure which persuades people to buy. There are many tried and tested formulae for sales copy, the best known being AIDA (Attention, Interest, Desire, Action). A structure like this helps because it mirrors how people buy.



The Copy Review evaluates your current copy against these key criteria.

The role of a Copy Review in Conversion Rate Optimisation

So how do you know if your copy is performing to its optimal level? Often this will become apparent in the early stages of Conversion Rate Optimisation project, when in-depth research and analysis of the entire visitor journey through a website is being carried out.

The aim is to see where potential customers are dropping out and identify barriers to conversion. If there is an issue with copy at any point, it is often revealed during qualitative research with customers such as usability testing.

If it is identified that the issue with copy relates to a specific web page, there may be a need to simply re-write the copy, in conjunction with other design and structural changes.

However, if it is discovered that there is a site-wide issue with product copy, then a Copy Review should be undertaken. Typically, a Copy Review has two parts:

- 1 A Copy Audit to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the existing product copy and uncover common themes with existing product copy which may be affecting conversion
- 2 The creation of a Copy Specification. Usually this includes a framework or product Copy Template and a Style Guide.

The reason why it is important to create a Copy Specification is because product copy changes all the time as new products are introduced. New copy is constantly being written – often by more than one writer. Whether copy is written in-house or outsourced, there is a need to keep it compelling, consistent and on-brand. Giving the writers a specification to work to ensures future product copy will have consistency, aid conversion and assist search engine optimisation even when several writers work on it.

This process has many benefits. Typically, writers find it makes writing product copy easier, faster and more enjoyable. For the company, speeding up the writing time helps to reduce costs. It also eases the burden on management time and resources, as being able to check copy against a specification makes it quicker and easier to approve. Controlled tests have demonstrated that copy improvements based on using a specification can improve conversion rates by over 30%.

Types of web copy

Every piece of copy that appears on a website has a job to do and can be optimised for conversion. Different types of copy include:

Home page copy

Home page copy is often a landing page, and may be a prime opportunity to engage website visitors, so it's essential that it is appealing and reflects the brand. Re-writing the copy is often recommended as part of a CRO programme.

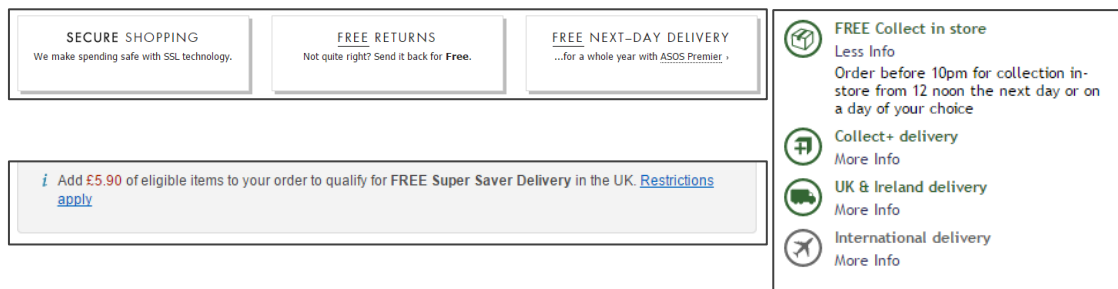
Static Pages

Pages such as delivery, returns, FAQ and so on are often not written by a professional copywriter, because they are not seen as 'selling pages'. Yet when a customer is buying they can have a major influence on a purchasing decision, so there is often a great deal of scope to improve these pages and increase conversion.

Boilerplates and Microcopy

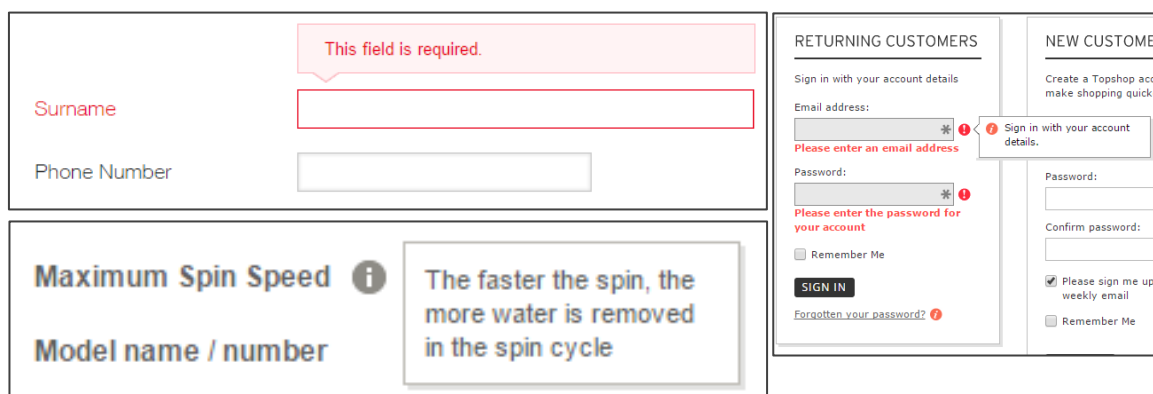
Frequently occurring small pieces of static copy are often overlooked because they are short and unglamorous. However, for the customer they are part of the total shopping experience, so play a crucial part in optimising the site.

Boilerplates are short pieces of copy which occur in several places, such as a key benefit statement, or a delivery pop up.



Example boilerplate copy on ASOS.com, Amazon.com and House of Fraser

Microcopy includes error messages and ‘What’s This’ explanations and is often overlooked, but can also have a significant impact on sales. Microcopy is often heavily used in the checkout, so optimising these phrases can have a profound impact on conversion.



Example microcopy on Marks & Spencer, John Lewis and Topshop

If an issue is identified, such as visitors dropping out at the delivery and returns stage, boilerplate copy can be re-written to increase conversion rates. As AWA digital has proved for a number of clients, making even small improvements can deliver impressive results.

Product copy

The pages mentioned above normally only need to be re-written once. Product copy needs to be re-written frequently as stock changes and new products are introduced.

At the point when the visitor has clicked through to the product page, they are already engaged with the item. If they fail to buy at this stage, it's possible that the copy needs to be more dynamic, informative, sincere and well-structured in order to clinch the sale.

When product copy is identified as a barrier to conversion, a full copy review is recommended. This not only provides a solution to the underperformance of the existing copy, but, by creating a Specification, ensures that the conversion optimisation will continue, even when copy is written for future products.

Case Study – Northern Parrots

When AWA digital optimised the website for leading online pet store, Northern Parrots, copy on the home page played a crucial role. Working closely with the Lead Optimiser, the page was re-designed and re-written resulting in a 34 per cent uplift when the new page was split-tested against the old one.

How to carry out a copy review

There are two parts to a copy review. Firstly, you need to undertake a Copy Audit to review existing product copy and identify areas for improvement. Then, you use this insight to create a Copy Specification.

PART 1 - Copy Audit

This is a three-step process:

- 1 Identify around 10-20 best-selling products for review. We recommend choosing bestsellers because they have the highest traffic, which helps to ensure faster and more reliable results when the new copy is split tested against the old.
- 2 Re-write this product copy along classic direct marketing principles, using a tried and tested sales copy formula such as AIDA. Adopt a tone-of-voice which is appropriate for your business model and brand personality. Take into account any other research findings from your CRO research, so that the issues that potential customers have are addressed. If key information is missing liaise with your buying team to fill in the gaps, whenever possible.
- 3 Compare the old and the new pieces of product copy side by side to see where existing copy works well and where it could be improved. It is

important to make sure that any strengths of the existing copy are maintained.

The Copy Audit addresses the following aspects of the copy:

- **Features and Benefits** - Does it describe all the features and benefits a customer needs to make a purchasing decision? Customer benefits (not just the features) should be clearly highlighted. Sometimes it is appropriate for product copy to convey a scene for the customer and suggest occasions or ways to use it.
- **Key Information** - Does it give key information that is not obvious from the product name or photographs and that can only come from handling the items? Describing if the product is heavy or light, soft or hard, how it smells or feels against the skin helps bring it to life
- **Tone of voice** - Is the tone of voice right for the brand and target audience? Tone of voice is achieved mainly through vocabulary, and should not detract from the underlying message and structure. A good test is to see how the copy sounds when you read it out loud.
- **Length** - Is the length appropriate for the type of website and products being sold?
- **Persuasion** - Does the copy follow a tried and tested framework? Is the value proposition expressed clearly answering the question 'Why should I buy from you?'
- **Active Tone of Voice** - Is it compelling and written in an active tone - for example starting with an active word such as 'enjoy', 'imagine' or 'indulge', rather than 'this' or 'a'? Is it written in the present continuous tense – for example, 'adds a splash of colour' rather than 'it will add a splash of colour'?

- **Readability** - Is it easy to skim read, making it scannable for the web?
- **Credibility** - Credibility is an important part of the sales process and brand promise. It's important that the copy accurately reflects the product and uses authentic words to describe it. Readers allow a degree of poetic licence, especially when passion for the product shines through, but inappropriate descriptions, gushing adjectives and overuse of exclamation marks can weaken credibility. Don't describe a product as 'luxury' when it clearly is something rather basic.
- **Sincerity** - Copy should strive to describe real situations for using the product. Overarching statements such as 'looks marvellous in any room' can dilute the effectiveness of copy. It is more powerful to say, for example, 'an excellent statement piece for a minimalist bedroom'.
- **Written for one person** - Copy is read by one person at a time, so should be written for one person. Avoid phrases that address a crowd such as "Will passengers please be aware" or "For those of you".
- **You vs. We** - The customer is only interested in themselves, not your company. One test is to count up how often 'you' is used compared with 'we' 'us' or 'our'. Try to make sure that 'You' is used at least twice as often as 'We'.
- **Differentiation** - This is important where the website sells several similar products with different features. It should be easy for the customer to quickly see what the differences are and why they should be paying more for the premium versions.
- **Search Engine Optimisation** - Is it optimised for search without being over-stuffed with keywords that can detract from the flow of the copy?

- **Clarity** - Online copy needs to get straight to the point. Web visitors want copy to be clear, rather than clever. It should be easy to scan, and have a clear purpose.
- **Call to Action** - The copy should ask for the sale whenever possible. It's surprising how often copy omits this vital step.

PART 2 – Copy Specification

The insight gained during the Copy Audit is then used to create the Copy Specification. This is always bespoke to your individual website, and typically includes:

- A detailed product Copy Template, setting out a standard format, framework and style for writers to follow. For short product copy, this may be set at sentence level, and for longer product copy it may be at paragraph level.
- A detailed Style Guide that sets out the tone of voice for all copy appearing on the website, including relevant examples. When followed, this ensures consistency and that all copy reflects the brand promise of the company.
- Examples of product copy to illustrate how the template should be used.

The Copy Template may also specify key features such as:

- Description of the product – including essential information not obvious from the photograph, such as how it's made, how it feels and what inspired the design
- How the product is used
- Headings

- Keywords for search engine optimisation
- Size and information tab
- Key benefits
- Call to action
- Relevant cross-sells

Two example Copy Templates are shown below:

Framework:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begin with essential information which is not obvious from the photo or title, such as items included in the set, how it's made, how it feels, what inspired the design. • If appropriate, suggest possible uses. • End on an additional benefit or call to action. • Mention relevant cross-sells where appropriate (eg: Matching cushion available). 		

Paragraph 1 – first sentence	Description of the coat, accurately describing the style and non-visual benefits such as softness, comfort and warmth.	Authentically passionate about the coat. (The kind of thing that an assistant in one of your stores would say to a customer).
Paragraph 1 – second sentence	Styling tips to help the reader imagine wearing the product.	Fashion editor style. Suggestions should be genuinely appropriate and specific.
Paragraph 2	Material, length and fastening.	Statement of fact

Once the Copy Template, Style Guide and examples have been created, it is passed to the writing team who write copy for the website to start using.

Care should be taken when introducing the new process to get 'buy-in' from the writing team. Make the writers aware of the reasons why the new system has been introduced and the benefits for both them and the company.

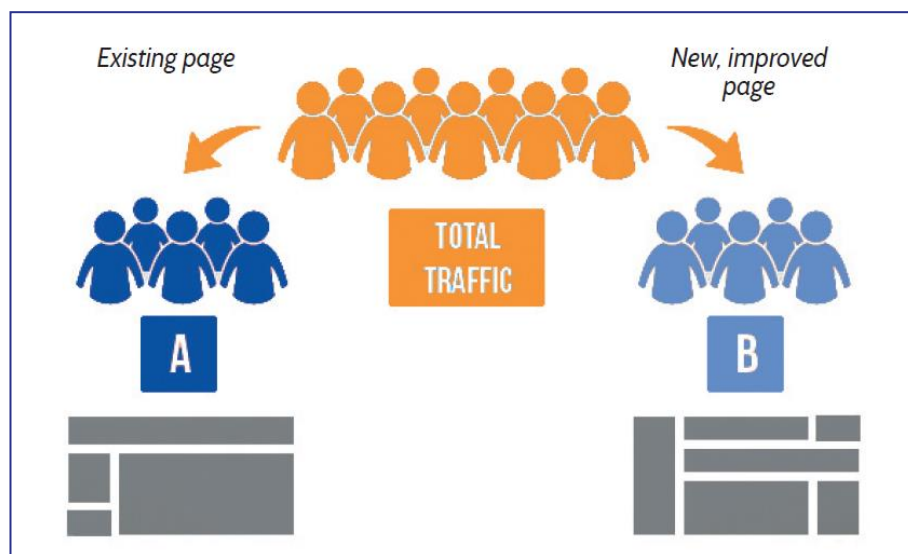
A follow up should always take place to make sure that the writing team are finding the Copy Specification easy to implement. Should any questions

arise, or any difficulties be encountered, it may be necessary to fine tune or adjust the template so that it achieves the goals of:

- making it quicker and easier to write product copy
- making it quicker and easier to approve product copy
- ensuring a consistent tone of voice
- enhancing the brand and - above all
- converting at a higher rate

How to use split testing to prove the value of your new copy

Rather than simply making changes to your website, we recommend using a tool such as Optimizely to split test the changes you want to make. Split testing involves sending half of your traffic to the original page with the original copy and half to the new page with the new copy.



This scientific process allows you to monitor the performance of both pages so you can discover whether your new copy structure does indeed lead to higher sales.

But this isn't just about stroking your copywriting team's ego. Re-writing copy for each of your products is likely to be a time consuming task. Split testing the old and new copy and monitoring the uplift in key metrics such as

revenue per visitor and conversion rate will help justify the additional investment needed to undertake this task for your entire product range as the benefits are quantifiable.

Case Study = Cox & Cox

Cox & Cox is a leading homeware online retailer. Launched in 2001 the company offers an eclectic collection of products and gifts for individuals who want to find that 'something special' not available on the High Street.

Although Cox & Cox already had a relatively well optimised site, with a higher than average conversion rate, the company felt more could be done, so turned to our experts.

Following detailed research, a number of improvements were made to the site. However, a Copy Review, carried out by one of AWA's experienced copywriters, resulted in a massive uplift of 36.7 per cent in revenue per visitor when the new copy was split tested against the original.

The Copy Audit for Cox & Cox confirmed the findings of usability research by the Lead Optimiser, that product copy did not answer key questions.

Introducing a formal structure to the copy provided the framework to ensure that key benefits are always included, while keeping the quirky, eclectic personality of the Cox & Cox brand.

As well as suggesting changes to the product description, our copywriter also recommended that the product page copy be re-designed to include tabs. This separated the sales copy for product descriptions from more functional information, such as size, weight, electrical currents and care instructions.

Having proved, through split testing, that the formula results in higher sales, now all Cox & Cox copy is written using the Copy Specification and Template we prepared.

“ As well as increasing sales, introducing a new Copy Template has made it quicker and easier to write product copy, improving the quality of transparent information for our customers. The template gives us confidence that we are producing copy that is appealing and informative and means that process is no longer a chore.

I have found this exercise extremely useful with long-lasting results. I would recommend anyone to think about reviewing their copy in this way.

Kate Vincent, Cox & Cox.

Are you reviewing your copy?

A Copy Review is a vital part of our CRO projects and has helped us discover insightful data about the impact of informative and persuasive copy on our clients' websites.

From learning which aspects of your copy works and which don't, to establishing a standardised format, a Copy Review offers a huge range of benefits for your business. By taking the time to undertake a Copy Review you can:

- Identify the pages on your website where the copy is an issue
- Discover the strengths and weaknesses of your existing product copy
- Uncover common themes in your copy which may be affecting conversion rates
- Develop a framework and Style Guide for your web copy

Discovering all this gives you the ideal opportunity to optimise your conversion rate and increase revenue per visitor.

Get the help and advice you need to turbo-charge your web sales.

About the author



World leading optimization expert and boardroom advisor, Dan delivers stirring talks on using CRO to build and grow any business, with first hand success stories from blue-chip companies from around the globe.

Drawing on his experience as CEO of the global website optimization agency AWA digital, Dan's engaging performances combine up-to-date knowledge and wisdom, with valuable insights and actionable takeaways that will have your delegates nodding and note making.

Dan is also co-author of the Amazon best seller 'E-Commerce Website Optimization: Why 95% of your website visitors don't buy – and what you can do about it', published by Kogan Page. Dan holds a MBA from Bath University and was made of Fellow of the Institute of Direct Marketing in 2004.

If you need any further help or advice, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

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Next steps

Are you serious about implementing website improvements that deliver massive sales increases to the bottom line?

At AWA we're here to help companies like yours master all aspects of web optimisation. That's why we're offering a free consultation with one of our Lead Optimisers – to show you how to get up to speed with CRO.

Your free, no-obligation consultation is tailored to your business, to give you some of the most useful and practical advice you'll find anywhere. Delivered at a time to suit you, there's no limit on the number of people who can attend, so your whole team can benefit.

Lasting 30 minutes, you'll learn

- Exactly how to get an effective CRO programme running in your business (OR how to optimise your efforts, if you already have an in-house CRO programme)
- The top conversion mistakes most multichannel businesses make, and how to avoid them
- 5 personalised recommendations to implement now for fast results

Book your free no-obligation 30 minute CRO consultation now. Just follow the link on the next page and fill out the form so we can get it all set up for you.

Free no-obligation 30 minute CRO consultation

Note: this is not a sales presentation. We aim to give you the best advice we can in 30 minutes to help you do CRO yourself.

[Get a free consultation](#)



AWA digital is one of the UK's leading conversion rate optimisation consultancies, helping multi-channel and online retailers increase sales, repeat business and visitor satisfaction.

Our experienced team of web analysts and ecommerce specialists use a range of tools – from in-depth website data analysis to usability testing – to show you how you can quickly boost conversion rates, repeat business and visitor satisfaction. Our pinpoint analysis of your online campaigns will show exactly what's working, what's not and what you need to change to get results that you are bound to make you smile.

We offer our services to both multi-channel and ecommerce retailers, as well as agencies who wish to extend their range of services to include conversion rate optimisation.

Our direct clients include Dunelm, Richer Sounds, Barbour, Interflora, Cotton Traders, Ironmongery Direct, Dune, Bettys and Taylors of Harrogate as well as a number of large and small B2B businesses.

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