

Top 10 Don'ts for SEO Copywriting

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There is no shortage of don'ts when it comes to SEO copywriting. It seems this niche got off to a rough start many years ago when early comers somehow misconstrued the core principles of the trade. Allow me to elaborate on how not to write SEO copy.

1. Don't shove as many keyphrases into the copy as humanly possible. It's not about the sheer volume of search terms you include. Yes, Google and other engines should be able to follow what the page is about. Yes, engines are looking to match a searcher's query with search engine optimized content on your web pages, but which pages land at the top is decided through a series of calculations far more complex than any simple ratio. When you overload copy with keyphrases you sacrifice quality and user experience.

2. Don't lose site of balance. If SEO copywriting isn't about the percentage of keywords within the copy, then what is it about? Balance. You have two audiences with SEO copywriting: the search engines and your site visitors. But surprisingly, the balance doesn't come with serving both masters well. The balance comes in how much you cater to the engines. You see, your site visitors always come first. However, if you write with too little focus on the engines, you won't see good rankings. If you put too much focus on the engines, you'll start to lose your target audience. Balance... always balance.

3. Don't let someone else choose the keywords. If keyword research isn't a service you offer, an SEO firm, keyword specialist or some other professional that your client hires will have to conduct the research. Don't just accept keyphrases these folks toss your way. Ask to see the entire list with recommendations as to which terms would be best strategically. Then you, as the professional writer, can decide which will also work best within the copy.

4. Don't sacrifice flow for numbers. This is a follow-up to number three and is a major issue with bad SEO copywriting. SEOs or clients sometimes insist on using hacked-up search phrases that simply don't work in a normal sentence. An example? "Candies samples free." Many copywriters will just grin and bear it, sacrificing quality and flow for the sake of competitive values or other numbers. The result is often some obnoxious sentence like, "If you're looking for candies samples free, you've come to the right place!" Forcing a phrase into the copy at all costs never turns out well.

5. Don't use keyphrases that don't apply to the page. If you operate a site about wedding receptions, don't try to force a search term about wedding dresses into the copy just because it pulls a lot of traffic. (A) Unless you sell, alter or design wedding dresses, it won't be applicable. (B) Even if you manage to get the page ranked well for the phrase [wedding dresses], once the visitor clicks to your site and realizes you have nothing to do with wedding dresses, they will leave. It's a waste of time and effort and it creates a poor user experience.

6. Don't use misspellings and correct spellings on the same page. I fully understand that the misspellings of keyphrases can be valuable search terms. However, to mix correct spellings and misspellings within the same page of copy looks like you've got a bunch of typos in the content. It's just not professional. Some writers will go for the old, "We rent limousines (sometimes spelled limosenes) for the most affordable prices in town." I don't care for that approach. It's just not natural. Would you ever see brochure or newspaper copy that reads that way? I think not.

7. Don't use keyphrases the exact same way every time. This is how we end up with horrible SEO copy that sounds like a 4th grader wrote it. (See #4.) There are lots of ways to use keywords in copy, not just one. In order to sound natural, you have to get creative with your keyphrase use. One way is to break up phrases using punctuation. Since search engines don't pay attention to basic punctuation marks, you can easily write something using the search term

[real estate Hawaii] that reads like this: "Currently there is an impressive selection of available real estate. Hawaii listings can be..." See? "Real estate" is at the end of the first sentence and "Hawaii" is at the beginning of the second sentence. The engines ignore the period so there's no problem.

8. Don't use all types of search phrases for every situation. There are many ways in which this "don't" applies. One quick example is that of an ecommerce site. It wouldn't be advisable to use specific, long-tail keyphrases on the home page of your site. They are much too specific in most cases and are better suited for individual product pages. Broader terms are typically best for an ecommerce home page. If you don't understand the best applications for the various types of keywords, you're likely to have lackluster results.

9. Don't neglect ALT tags/image attributes. These tags are the ones associated with images on your pages and they carry a good deal of weight especially if the image is used as a link. The ALT text counts the same as anchor text in a text-based link. Depending on a few different factors, ALT text may be a good place for those misspellings mentioned in #6.

10. Don't forget the chain of protocol. There's a method to the SEO copywriting madness. The idea is not to get as many different keyphrases onto a page as possible. Just the opposite, in fact. Rather than having 12 different search terms used only one time each, you need to use two to four keyphrases (depending on the length of your copy) per page. The title, META tags, ALT tags, other coding elements and on-page copy need to support each other as far as keyphrase use goes. Your goal is to let the engines know that you have original, relevant content about a narrow topic.

Unless you have an exceptional number of back links built up, just mentioning [dark chocolate], [chocolate strawberries], [chocolate chip cookies], [chocolate cake], [chocolate desserts], [organic chocolate] and [chocolate cheesecake] once each on a web page isn't likely to do a lot of good. Instead, pick two or three terms which are closely related and use them several times each along with mentioning them in your tags.

When you avoid making common mistakes, you'll find your SEO copywriting flows much better, is more natural-sounding and ranks higher, too.

Karon Thackston gives more exceptional insights into web & search engine copywriting in her book "Effective Websites for Small Businesses." Find out the importance of copywriting when you need [to build a small business website](#). Check it out today at <http://www.EffectiveWebsitesForSmallBusinesses.com>.