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Copywriting Training Courses – Method or Madness?

Can copywriting be taught? Are copywriting training courses a good idea? These are interesting questions, especially in times of economic uncertainty and high unemployment when vulnerable people may be enticed by the promise of a new, well-paid career.

As with so many other types of training, results are linked to an individual's suitability for the course in question, as well as their level of commitment. When it comes to 'suitability', people who are already working in a marketing environment have a head start. Copywriting of one sort or another will usually play a big part in their day-to-day activities. Enrolling on a reputable copywriting training course has a high chance of paying dividends and therefore makes sense.

Mid-way along the 'suitability' spectrum are individuals who work in a non-marketing environment – or those who run small to medium-size companies who want to gain some knowledge of copywriting. This could be either to write their own copy in-house, or to better understand what their advertising or PR agency specialists are saying.

Those who are potentially most at risk from unscrupulous 'training professionals' are individuals with no prior experience of copywriting or marketing. Unless they have high levels of motivation – and the training company they are using is truly professional and effective – going down this route could prove to be a massive waste of time and money.

Fortunately, this is a rarity in the UK, despite the absence of government regulation. Training is offered by a variety of organisations and individuals. These range from professional trade bodies and training companies to specialist agencies or expert consultants working in the marketing and copywriting field. There is also the option of distance

learning provided by long-established companies, or newer operators providing cost-effective online options.

In the vast majority of cases, these will all provide an excellent service. As with all services of this type, it pays to do some homework to decide which is the best provider to use. It's also important for those who are looking to embark on a copywriting training course to examine their own motivations and level of commitment.

Copywriting Training: Think, Then Decide

Professional workplace training is all about influencing 'ways of working'. These influences and initiatives can and should come from the trainer; but they must also come from within the trainee. A student must be encouraged to envisage how new ideas and practical ways of working can be applied in their real world.

It's almost like role playing in your mind's eye – trying to imagine how a scene (or challenging project) could be best played out in order to arrive at an optimal solution. Of course, a good trainer can help a student to enter into a mindset which performs an 'enabling' function to instil confidence in the notion that a task or strategy is achievable.

A good comparison could be with a top sports coach. Some call it 'man management' – but it's more about the coach (or trainer) connecting with the need for success within the individual or student. It's about creating the right psychological environment where real achievement is seen as being more 'probable' than 'possible' – PROVIDING that knowledge or advice is applied to a scenario that is within an individual's mental and physical capabilities. If it's 'off the scale' and seems like pie-in-the-sky, the coach/trainer will have failed.

To go back to the workplace and how training can influence 'ways of working', it's important to look at the roles of both parties – trainer and trainee – in this complex equation.

From the Trainer's Angle...

The training focus is on the techniques a trainer uses to influence ways of working. It's not only about providing a trainee with the facts surrounding 'How to do X, Y or Z'. They can find this information in a book or on the Internet.

It's more to do with a trainee being encouraged to see how the facts surrounding the issue or technique being discussed can be applied to their

own workplace situation with a view to changing and improving their ways of working.

It's very much a 'holistic' approach. When and how an individual performs a task isn't something that's done in isolation. By definition, every piece of work that anyone does in the workplace will have consequences! It will impact on clients, colleagues, team effort, efficiency and profitability.

Here is a simple example. If somebody attends a training course about website copywriting, they may well discover lots of interesting details about usability, search engine optimisation (SEO) or landing-page effectiveness. Beyond this, however, lies the inescapable fact that website copywriting is not an end in itself. It will affect, variously, web designers, SEO specialists, a client's business performance, the response rates of that client's own range of clients – and, of course, the 'success' of the website copywriter himself.

So the trainer looks beyond the mechanics of whatever skillset is being covered. Psychologically, the trainee already has a commitment to this subject by virtue of the fact that they're attending a training session. They will already have an empathy with what is being taught, although levels of expertise will also reflect previous experience.

From the Trainee's Perspective

To maximise the effectiveness of training, the trainee has a responsibility to think carefully about what they want from training i.e. what they want to achieve on both a personal and professional level, and how they are going to take on board the new external stimuli that the training will provide.

This includes how they expect to see training changing their ways of working to achieve pre-set goals; how the training and its individual impact will affect others around them such as colleagues, suppliers and clients; and how much their initial training will be part of a longer term personal development strategy.

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