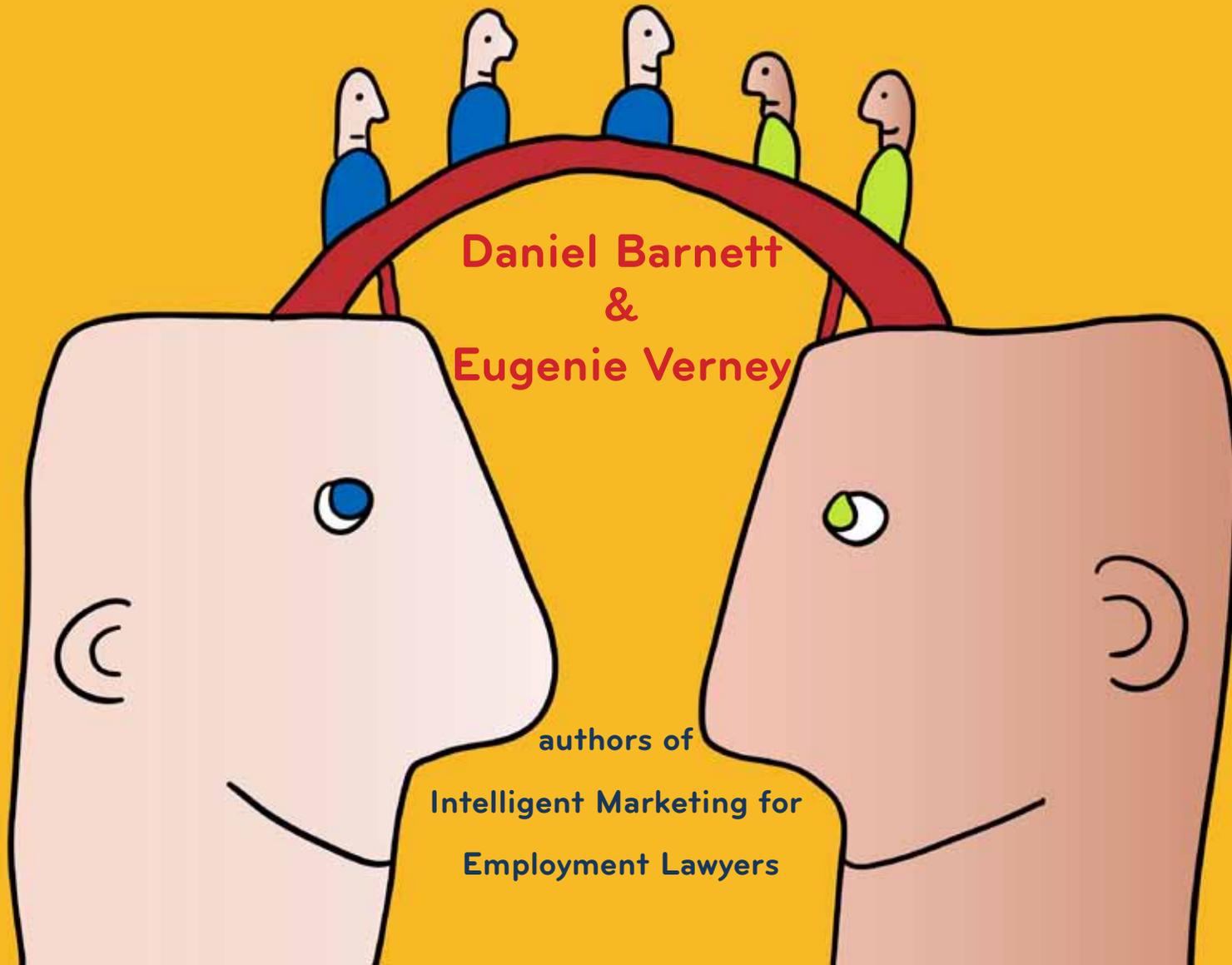
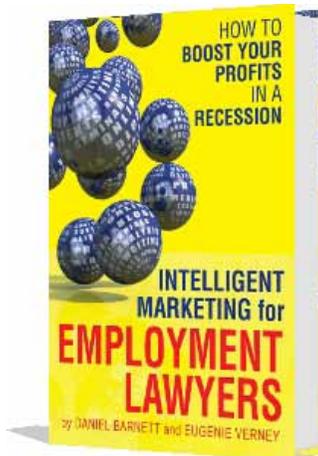


Copywriting Is Not a Gift!

Five key steps to getting your message across...



Parts of this book appear in Intelligent Marketing for Employment Lawyers
the new book by Daniel Barnett and Eugenie Verney
published by Employment Law Services Ltd, October 2009, ISBN 9780955388613. Used by permission



Available from www.intelligentmarketingforlawyers.co.uk

© 2009 Daniel Barnett and Eugenie Verney
The copyright holders are licensing this under the Creative Commons Licence
Attribution 2.0 (England and Wales) and Attribution 2.5 (Scotland)
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/uk/>
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.5/scotland/>

Graphic design by Gisele Malenfant www.timelessdigital.org
Cover illustration by Miroslaw Pieprzyk

**Please feel free to post this e-book on your blog or
email it to anyone you feel would benefit from reading it. Thanks!**

Copywriting Is Not a Gift!

Five key steps to getting your message across...

page 2	Introduction
page 3	Step # 1 Identify who you're talking to...
page 5	Step # 2 Keep it simple...
page 10	Step # 3 You and yours...
page 12	Step # 4 Breaking up your text...
page 15	Step # 5 Junk the jargon...
page 21	About the authors

Introduction

Why copywriting is not a gift...

What on earth do we mean?

Surely there are legions of hugely successful copywriters out there earning a fortune? Yes, indeed there are. Especially American direct sales advertising specialists who can—and do—earn millions from their craft.

But that's the point.

It's a craft, not a gift. We're not talking innate talent here (or not often). We're talking self-discipline, dogged determination, being prepared to continually listen and learn, making mistakes along the way, and generally putting in the hours until it's nailed. This is nothing to do with literature or creative genius and everything to do with knowing who you want to reach and how to do it.

And this is good news, because it means we can all become competent copywriters as long as we're prepared to invest time in the groundwork and follow some pretty straightforward steps.

Step # 1

Identify who you're talking to...

If you've read the first ebook in our Intelligent Marketing series—**Top Ten Marketing Mistakes Lawyers Make**—you'll know that before you write a word you need to have identified who it is you want to reach, and what you want to say. You can't hope to produce effective copy, or get any other aspect of your marketing right, if you're operating in a vacuum. So if you haven't already done so, run through these steps to complete **Step # 1**:

1. Define who you really want as clients

You became an employment lawyer for a reason—now is the time to remind yourself why. What type of work brings you the most satisfaction? What type of client? If you're struggling with this, try coming at it from the other direction. What type of work bores you to tears? Which of your clients makes your heart sink when their number comes up on your phone or their emails arrive in your inbox? You need to be honest with yourself—nobody's going to know what you're doing here except you!

2. Match your ideal with the real world

Start building up a picture of your ideal clients, and the more detail you can go into the better. You're looking for real people, real businesses, real names, real faces.

3. Put yourself in their shoes

Make a list of all the reasons why this ideal client needs what you're offering through your specialist employment law niche. You're looking at it from their viewpoint, not yours, so you need to consider:

- your strengths and your weaknesses
- ways of capitalising on your strengths
- honing them so they get closer to your ideal client's expectations.

Then have a good look at what else do you need to do to define your niche.

4. What can you offer that your competitors can't?

Single out the elements of your service that really make you stand out. You'll be building on these in the copy you write, highlighting the *benefits* you bring your clients through your firm's exceptional *features*. Need reminding what we mean here? The type of metal used to build a car is a *feature*; how it withstands the impact of an accident is a *benefit*.

Step # 2

Keep it simple...

You should by now have a good idea of *who* it is you're addressing and *what* you want to say to them—and you'll be saying the same thing across all your marketing materials. This is important: your message needs to be consistent, whether you're publicising a seminar or revamping your home page.

And it also needs to be simple—just follow the KISS principle (and if you don't know what that means, Google it!). This may sound heretical, but we believe that marketing is most effective when it's uncomplicated. It's tempting to over-egg the process, and when it comes to copywriting it's particularly important to stay focused on what you want to achieve and then go ahead and achieve it as simply as you can. This largely boils down to saying:

- this is who I am
- this is what I've got
- this is what it does for you
- this is what I want you to do next.

An over-simplification, of course, and you could never be that blunt—especially when marketing something as sophisticated as legal services. But it's worth keeping this formula—the credit for it goes to top US copywriter John Carlton—within your line of sight when you start writing and using it regularly as your benchmark: if your copy doesn't touch on any of those four elements, then ditch it!

To help you move the process along, try this long-established yardstick used to test the effectiveness of advertising copywriting. It's centred on the operative acronym AIDA:

- **A**ttention
- **I**nterest
- **D**esire
- **A**ction.

Translated into the writing process, this means:

- grabbing your reader's **attention**, usually with a compelling headline
- holding your reader's **interest** by offering something relevant to their needs
- creating your reader's **desire** to find out more
- getting your reader to take **action**.

Keeping it simple also means keeping it succinct. And that's irrespective of whether you're writing 50 words or 500. There has been a decades-long—and unresolved—debate among copywriters about whether 'long' or

‘short’ copy works best. What do they mean? ‘Long’ copy is exactly that: it’s the text you find in magazine-style direct sales mailshot promotions. It runs to several pages and answers every possible question you could ever imagine asking about the product or service. You’ll find it too on many website landing pages where you arrive after clicking on a direct link in an email. Lots of words, through which you can keep on scrolling until you’re satisfied you know exactly what you’re being invited to do. By contrast, you’ll most often find ‘short’ copy in visually-led brand advertising—just a few words designed to draw you in, intrigue and whet your appetite.

Until very recently, the consensus was that ‘long’ copy trumped ‘short’ in just about every context, but the internet is—as with so much—changing that. The leading American copywriters are now reporting that brevity wins the day when they test traditional long copy against a shorter, tighter version. Not a five-word version, but something carefully stripped down to become ‘short long copy’. And where they lead, the rest of the marketing world tends to follow...

What they stress, however, is that no matter the ultimate length of your copy, you must strive for clarity, brevity and accessibility. We all find short, tight sentences easier to read, and we’re all more comfortable starting a paragraph when we can see its end. Do not lose sight of that and never imagine your client’s brain works any differently just because you’re marketing a sophisticated legal service rather than an electronic gadget or vitamin pill.

Also central to keeping it simple is making sure you avoid using a long word when a shorter one will do and dispensing with several words when one works just as well. Over the page are some examples of what we mean...

(A quick aside: if you’re using Microsoft Word—and most of us are—be sure to set your language to English

Don't use long words when short ones will do...

× additional	✓ more	× facilitate	✓ help
× ascertain	✓ learn, find out	× initiate	✓ start
× assist	✓ help	× obtain	✓ get, receive
× commence	✓ start	× purchase	✓ buy
× determine	✓ decide	× reside	✓ live, stay
× discontinue	✓ stop, end	× terminate	✓ stop
× endeavour	✓ try	× utilise	✓ use
× establish	✓ set up		

...or several words when one will do...

× as a consequence of	✓ because of	× in the course of	✓ during
× by means of	✓ by, with, using	× in the event of	✓ if
× for the reason that	✓ because	× in the vicinity of	✓ near
× in accordance with	✓ by, under	× in view of	✓ because
× in addition to	✓ besides	× on the part of	✓ by
× in excess of	✓ more than, over	× subsequent to	✓ after
× in order to	✓ to	× with the exception of	✓ except
× in the absence of	✓ without		

(United Kingdom), and never, ever rely on the spellchecker. Making the grammar changes it recommends can as often as not turn a perfectly good sentence into complete gibberish! Use your common sense instead.)

Step # 2 is to bring together all these ingredients to keep your copy tight, accessible and simple. We suggest that before you start writing anything new you apply these basic principles to some existing copy written to market your firm's services. It doesn't matter who wrote it—you, a colleague, or a marketing professional. A good place to start is your own website, going through the text page by page and highlighting what passes these tests and what needs revisiting. (We'll look at a few example sites shortly...)

Step # 3

You and yours...

You will by now have noticed that throughout this ebook we address you, our reader, directly.

Why are we doing this?

Look again at that sentence:

You will by now have noticed that throughout this book we are addressing you, our reader, directly.

We'll now translate this into the type of language that may be all too familiar to you—a style you used while you were training and may have carried across into your communications with clients and colleagues:

The reader of this book will by now have noticed that he or she is being addressed directly by the authors throughout.

Which version works better? Which engages you most immediately and swiftly? Which most effectively *gets the message across*? (The first example is incidentally also shorter—by 10 words—and, as we've just noted, in copywriting brevity is a virtue!) By talking straight to your client, and not from one level removed, you begin a conversation. You have caught your reader's attention, and you can now start building on that, bringing to life all your firm's *benefits* and only introducing *features* where they support the benefits.

We cannot over-emphasise how important it is for you to park your neutral, formal lawyer's style and get into the habit of using natural, conversational language to promote the benefits of your business whenever you are writing promotional copy. And it matters not a jot who you are talking to—a FTSE-100 company, an NHS Trust, a charity, a club, or a member of the public. The principle remains the same because we are all hard-wired the same, and it's a human being you're talking to. So **Step # 3** is remembering to focus on you and yours.

Step # 4

Breaking up your text...

As we've seen, unbroken slabs of text can be uninviting and we're all more comfortable reading copy when it's delivered in smaller chunks. For example, which of these is easier to read? This?

When you're writing copy to market your business, you need to break up the text to help hold your reader's attention. There are various ways of doing this. These include using boxes or sidebars to focus on a particular point you want to make, using sub-headings, using bullet points and numbers to separate ideas into lists, and using bold or italic text for emphasis.

Or this?

When you're writing copy to market your business, you need to break up the text to help hold your reader's attention. There are various ways of doing this. These include using...

- boxes or sidebars to focus on a particular point you want to make
- sub-headings
- bullet points and numbers to separate ideas into lists
- **bold** or *italic* text for emphasis.

Bullet points and numbered lists also force you to communicate concisely, and all leading copywriters employ them. But only use them where your text separates naturally; don't force words into bullet points or numbered lists for the sake of it. This, for example, works well:

Are you restructuring your business? Will you have to cut your workforce? We can guide you through the whole process, helping you follow the correct redundancy procedures and making sure all your staff understand what's happening every step of the way. Contact our senior partner John Adams now to find out how we can get you safely to the other side.

But this does not:

- are you restructuring your business?
- will you have to cut your workforce?
- we can guide you through the whole process.
- we can help you follow the correct redundancy procedures.
- we will make sure all your staff understand what's happening every step of the way.
- contact our senior partner John Adams now to find out how we can get you safely to the other side.

The flow, intimacy and natural progression of the original paragraph is lost and the tone has become hectoring instead of engaging, as though the reader is being shouted at and ordered about rather than invited into a conversation.

Step # 4 is therefore to always think about ways of breaking up your text—especially where there's a lot of it—but to hold back whenever you risk changing the meaning or altering the tone of what you're saying and instead explore whether there's another way of achieving a good flow.

Step # 5

Junk the jargon...

Trawl through a Google page of solicitor websites and we're prepared to bet that you'll find jargon, clichés, and gobbledegook punctuating the text in at least half of them—if not more.

We looked at common examples in our first ebook—**Ten Marketing Mistakes Lawyers Make**—but there are plenty more. And we admit we've been guilty of using them on occasion, in both our speech and writing, when we just can't be bothered to find the right words to articulate what we want to say. Or—confession—we succumb to emperor's new clothes syndrome: we do it because everyone else does it and so it must be OK.

But it really isn't.

The problem with using vacuous terms and phrases is that almost everyone knows full well that they're vacuous and you run the serious risk of triggering your reader's 'blah detector'. What's a blah detector? Just that—and you'll recognise it yourself: it's that feeling you get when the words before you tell you nothing and you've lost all interest in the message. It's at that point you click to close the web page or put the flyer in the bin. Do you *really* want people doing that to you?

There is, though, a significant difference between stilted clichés and jargon and colloquial turns of phrase and expressions we all use. Including the language of everyday conversation can—when you use it sparingly and in the right context—help your copy flow and make it more accessible. Some examples:

- get your message across
- tell the same story
- this is good news because...
- ...engage your audience's attention
- ...on the receiving end...
- ...how this translates into...
- ...in uncharted waters.

If you're at all sceptical about this, note that master copywriters employ this technique routinely and urge the rest of us to follow their lead. Do you really think they'd bother if it didn't work?

So **Step # 5** is to keep your copy clear of clichés and jargon, but don't be afraid to stay colloquial.

Before we conclude this brief overview of copywriting, we will as promised take a look at three examples from real law firm websites, chosen entirely at random. These practice descriptions—plus the punctuation, emphasis, and spelling—are exactly as they appear online, but the names have been removed as we're not in the business of naming and shaming!

Example 1

[FIRM'S NAME] can trace its roots back to 1910, when [FOUNDER'S NAME] was admitted as a solicitor and started practice in [NAME OF TOWN]. From those early days our reputation has become firmly established. And our ethos is still the same.

“To help clients resolve their problems and achieve their objectives in an approachable efficient and cost effective way”.

Please browse our website which will tell you about [NAME], its people and business. We hope it will answer your questions.

But nothing will convince you fully, until you instruct us to represent you. Only then, will you be able to experience for yourself, how [NAME] has become such a well respected, specialist, firm.

Example 2

[FIRM'S NAME] was established in [CITY] over twenty five years ago and have gained a reputation for high professional standards and a partner-led service to our business and entrepreneurial clients.

What we can offer:

- Expert advice in all our practice areas
- A high level of service and communication
- An understanding of commercial realities as well as the legal aspects of transactions
- An ability to act quickly
- A proactive approach in all aspects of the transaction always trying to increase the benefit to our client.

Example 3

[NAME] and [NAME] started in partnership in 1992. Although the partnership is relatively new in [TOWN], its origins go back further. Both Partners were formerly with established practices within the area, [PARTNER'S NAME] being the resident Partner in the [TOWN] office of [SECOND FIRM'S NAME] since it's opening in 1970. In 1992 the firm also acquired the former [TOWN] practice of [THIRD FIRM'S NAME] which had been established since the early 1950s.

Both Partners are well experienced in most of the usual legal problems Clients are likely to encounter and can offer advice on a wide variety of subjects. They are supported by an able and helpful staff most of whom followed the Partners from their previous practices.

How does this copy perform against the five copywriting steps we've outlined in this ebook? Has each piece of text been written with someone clearly in mind? Does the copy focus on *benefits* rather than *features*, and address the four key stages—*here's who I am; here's what I've got; here's what it'll do for you; here's what I want you to do next*? Is it succinct and simple, using accessible, colloquial English? Is it easy to read, or are there too many large chunks of text? What about jargon and clichés?

We've done our own critique of these examples—and a couple more. You can find this in the [Resources PDF](#) that accompanies our new book, *Intelligent Marketing for Employment Lawyers*. Just go to the section for Chapter 5. You'll also find some more ideas along with links to some great sources of information to help you hone your copywriting.

And always hold this thought...

Copywriting really is not a gift!

About the authors

Daniel Barnett

Daniel Barnett (www.danielbarnett.co.uk) is a practising employment barrister widely recognised for his marketing skills. In 1999, he launched the Employment Law Bulletin mailing list and was the first UK lawyer to make widespread use of email for marketing purposes. The following year, he launched the UK's first legal email content service (www.emplawservices.co.uk), helping many firms of solicitors build up a substantial employment law practice. In 2006, he was the first UK lawyer to make use of telephone and video webinars, going on to co-found CPD Webinars (www.cpdwebinars.com) in early 2007. **Intelligent Marketing for Employment Lawyers** is his eighth book.



Eugenie Verney

Eugenie Verney (www.eugenieverney.com) has a Masters degree in employment law and is a professional mainstream and online communicator. Her extensive experience spans print and broadcast journalism—including The Guardian, Daily Express, Granada TV, and the BBC—commercial and public sector marketing, PR, copywriting, and corporate communications. She works with businesses and individuals to identify how best they can reach their clients using a mix of traditional and web-based marketing methods and guides them through putting theory into practice with tailored communications training and support.



We hope you're taking away some great ideas from this ebook!

But we've only scratched the surface here.

Our new book *Intelligent Marketing for Employment Lawyers* shows you **why** this is exactly the right time to raise your marketing game and **how** to blend a range of tried-and-tested tools with new online strategies for an **unbeatable edge!**

PLUS easy to follow how-to **action points** throughout!

PLUS invaluable insight from **eight high-profile employment law firms!**

PLUS online **Resources** for each chapter with links to even more great advice!

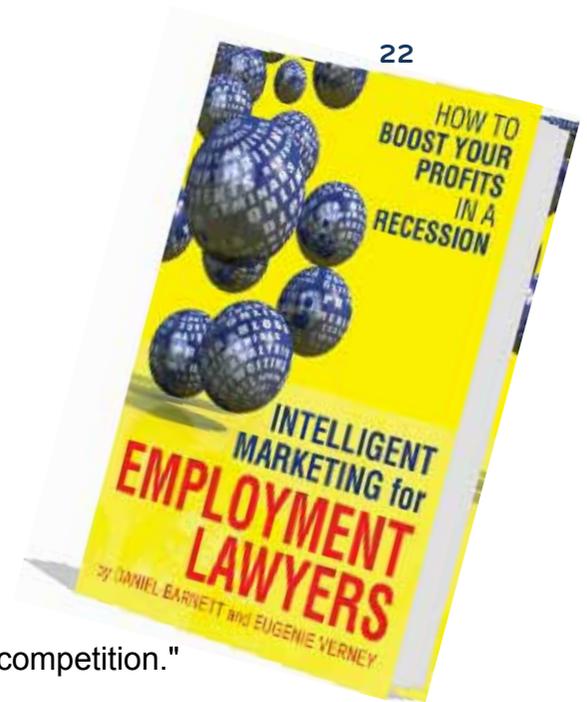
But don't just take our word for it! Here's what they're already saying about *Intelligent Marketing for Employment Lawyers*...

'Detailed "how-to" guidance enabling employment lawyers to stay one step ahead of the competition."
Rustom Tata, Partner, DMH Stallard LLP

'The law firm profiles add a dimension a standard marketing work can't compete with... the real question is whether you can afford NOT to digest this book's advice.'
Kate Sandison, Senior Associate, Osborne Clarke

'Inspirational and compelling... full of practical guidance for employment lawyers who want more clients. In the current climate this book is a "must read"!'
Marc Jones, Partner, Turbervilles

***Intelligent Marketing for Employment Lawyers* is a full-colour, 416-page hardback!**



ORDER YOUR COPY NOW!

www.intelligentmarketingforlawyers.co.uk