

Review

The Copywriter's Handbook: A step-by-step guide to writing copy that sells.

Written by Robert W. Bly

Published by Henry Hold and Company, LLC

MSRP: \$16.00

By Donald R. Carroll, Calvary Copywriting

There are very few books dedicated to the art and business of copywriting, only 45 titles on the subject show up on a search of Barnes and Noble. Robert Bly's book makes up 3% of the total copywriting library, that is a pretty big responsibility for one book to have. Given the dearth of guides available to aspiring copywriters, Bly's book automatically gets some points simply for existing, this review will deal with the rest of the points, and help you decide if this book is a good value for your educational dollar.

Something becomes very clear early in *The Copywriter's Handbook*: Mr. Bly is really good at self promotion. At times the book seems to be much more about Mr. Bly than about how the novice copywriter becomes a professional freelancer. That isn't all bad; after all, Mr. Bly encourages his readers to write copy which speaks to readers like a friend. Mr. Bly just happens to be a friend who talks an awful lot about himself.

Sometimes his personal anecdotes are helpful. When Mr. Bly reproduces his first sales letter on page 252, this example could really help narrow the reader's focus on what they need to be doing when they are writing sales letters. It could also scare them away from their newly chosen career. In the sales letter Mr. Bly dedicates two paragraphs to his qualifications, which include a BS in Chemical Engineering, and experience as a writer for both Westinghouse and Koch Engineering, as well as noting that he had a book called *Technical Writing: Structure, Standards and Style* published already. All of this before he ever did his first freelance job.

I know that when I read this sales letter and then looked at the one I had just written the

day before, I panicked a bit. "This is what it takes to make it as a freelancer?", I thought. I would never have guessed that I needed to be a published author before I even got to write my first brochure. The problem is that Bly doesn't offer an alternative letter, or suggestions for alternatives, that might be used by a true novice, nor does he point out to his readers that his background was highly unusual for a freelancer.

And this is the theme of the book. It is generally written in a tone that targets people who know very little about the advertising or writing business (he suggests, multiple times, that the reader acquire a typewriter or word processor), but when it comes down to specific examples, he breaks with his audience so radically that the examples become useless.

Where Bly shines is in those areas where he is most comfortable, the actually "copywrite-y" stuff. When Bly goes through "The Eight Headlines That Work", "11 Ways To Make Your Copy More Readable", and so on, he is very helpful. My guess is that is because his copy reads the same way, as in: "How To Earn More Money, Now!". These sections are helpful, to an extent. To a greater extent I don't know how many people really need "15 Ways To Open a Sales Letter", at times the lists become burdensome to read.

In all the book is just OK. The most important lesson in the book is that writing books, as Bly says, gives you the image of being a leader in your field. According to the inside cover of this book, Robert Bly has 15 titles to his credit, all having to do with how to market your business, or how to write. It really doesn't matter how good the books are, what is important is that Mr. Bly can list those books in his sales material and earn a level of credibility that most freelance writers can not. Mr. Bly suggests using teaching gigs at community colleges the same way, not because you love to teach, or want to help produce new talent, but to position yourself as an expert and authority in the field of advertising and copywriting.

