Editing Demo: Clear Text Editorial

Editor Antonia Morton uses MS Word's Track Changes function to show how a few tweaks can make a piece of problematic text much leaner and stronger.

Original text, with Comments

Every single business on this planet is dependent upon the writtten word to woe customers and win sales. However its a shocking fact of life that the majority of business owners and entrepreners have very little writing experience. Despite this the same business owners go full steam ahead and write there own customer materials and comunications rarely stopping to consider whether or not there writing actually makes sense and is powerful enough to encourage customers to take action. If you cares about your product and services you should care just as much about how you describe them to podential customers. This means getting your head around what consitutes great business writing.

Comment [A1]:	An extra letter has sneaked in .
Comment [A2]:	Spellcheck won't catch this typo, because "woe" is just as legitimate a word as "woo."
Comment [A3]:	This word takes a comma after.
Comment [A4]:	An apostrophe is missing here.
Comment [A5]:	Spelling error.
Comment [A6]:	This run-on sentence needs several commas to break it into readable chunks.
Comment [A7]:	Two words that are commonly confused: "there" and "their."
Comment [A8]:	A letter has dropped out.
Comment [A9]:	Pronoun-verb disagreement.
Comment [A10]:	Needs a comma here.
Comment [A11]:	Spelling error.
Comment [A12]:	Typo.
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Proofread

Every single business on this planet is dependent upon the written word to woo customers and win sales. However, it's a shocking fact of life that the majority of business owners and entrepreneurs have very little writing experience. Despite this, the same business owners go full steam ahead and write their own customer materials and communications, rarely stopping to consider whether or not their writing actually makes sense, and is powerful enough to encourage customers to take action. If you care about your product and services, you should care just as much about how you describe them to potential customers. This means getting your head around what constitutes great business writing.

At this point, the text is "correct": there are no errors. But is it as good as it could be – as direct and compelling? Watch what happens next.

Proofread text, with Comments

Every single business on this planet is dependent upon the written word to woo customers and win sales. However, it's a shocking fact of life that the majority of business owners and entrepreneurs have very little writing experience. Despite this, the same business owners go full steam ahead and write their own customer materials and communications, rarely stopping to consider whether or not their writing actually makes sense and is powerful enough to encourage customers to take action. If you care about your product and services, you should care just as much about how you describe them to potential customers. This means getting your head around what constitutes great business writing.

Comment [A13]:	I'm not sure that's quite true –let's tone down the hyperbole a bit.
Comment [A14]:	Always prefer verbs to adjectives, they activate your text.
Comment [A15]:	I'm not shocked – probably most business owners focus on their area of expertise, not on writing.
Comment [A16]:	Use the shorter word: "most."
Comment [A17]:	Even with commas, this is still a lengthy sentence – I'd break it up into short ones.
Comment [A18]:	Unless the business actually IS a steamship line, avoid this cliché.
Comment [A19]:	Is there a difference between the two terms? Pick one or the other.
Comment [A20]:	"Or not" is always redundant after "whether."
Comment [A21]:	This sounds a bit patronizing – let's leave it out.
Comment [A22]:	I think this is too colloquial.
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Deleted: the majority of	
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Deleted: getting your head around	

Stylistic edit

Every business depends on the written word to woo customers and win sales. However, it's a fact that most business owners and entrepreneurs have very little writing experience. Despite this, they go ahead and write their own customer materials— rarely stopping to consider whether their writing is actually powerful enough to encourage customers to take action. If you care about your product and services, you should care just as much about how you describe them to potential customers. This means learning what constitutes great business writing.

Now the paragraph is looking pretty good: it's leaner and less wordy. Let's kick it up another notch, with a substantive edit.

Revised text, with Comments

Every business depends on the written word to woo customers and win sales. However, it's a fact that most business owners and entrepreneurs have very little writing experience. Despite this, they go ahead and write their own customer materials—rarely stopping to consider whether their writing is actually powerful enough to encourage customers to take action. If you care about your product and services, you should care just as much about how you describe them to potential customers. This means learning what constitutes great business writing.

Substantive edit

Every business depends on words to win sales. But although few company owners have much experience with communications, often they write their own material anyway—without pausing to consider whether their message is powerful enough to woo customers.

As a business owner, of course you care about your product or service. But you should care just as much about how you describe what you offer to potential customers—and that means learning how to produce great business writing.

Now we're all done, let's look at the finished product:

Final "clean" version

Every business depends on words to win sales. But although few company owners have much experience with communications, often they write their own material anyway—without pausing to consider whether their message is powerful enough to woo customers.

As a business owner, of course you care about your product or service. But you should care just as much about how you describe what you offer to potential customers—and that means learning how to produce great business writing.

And here's the original again, for comparison:

Every single business on this planet is dependent upon the written word to woo customers and win sales. However, it's a shocking fact of life that the majority of business owners and entrepreneurs have very little writing experience. Despite this, the same business owners go full steam ahead and write their own customer materials and communications, rarely stopping to consider whether or not their writing actually makes sense and is powerful enough to encourage customers to take action. If you care about your product and services, you should care just as much about how you describe them to potential customers. This means getting your head around what constitutes great business writing.

See the difference? The paragraph now has only 78 words, compared to 111 at the start, so the message is about 30% shorter. It's also more efficient: the words are arranged more effectively, have more punch, and engage the reader better.

Again, I want to stress: this step-by-step explanation may make the editing process look slow. It's not. A skilled editor makes all these fixes at rapid-fire speed – so you get your text back as swiftly as possible, looking really good.

Clear Text Editorial, wwww.ClearTextEditorial.com

Comment [A23]: Do they have to be written? Spoken words count too.

Comment [A24]: This is a good phrase – let's save it for later.

Comment [A25]: "However" in this sentence, and "despite" in the next, are a bit unwieldy.

Comment [A26]: This phrase is just deadwood, so let's cut it.

Comment [A27]: Entrepreneurs are a specific type of owners – but really, this material applies to **everybody** who has a business.

Comment [A28]: There are too many repetitions of "writing" – reword this.

Comment [A29]: This adds nothing, let's delete.

Comment [A30]: The word "customer" is getting a bit over-used too.

Comment [A31]: We can shorten this a bit.

Comment [A32]: Can we break up the paragraph at this point?

Comment [A33]: Let's be more upbeat here: **of course** businesses care about what they do.

Comment [A34]: We should address the owners directly here, to engage them better.

Comment [A35]: Usually, a company offers either a product OR a service.

Comment [A36]: We should clarify what "them" means, and punch it up a little.

Comment [A37]: This word is a bit clunky, and doesn't address the issue: the audience needs to know just what good business writing **is**, but how to **create** it.

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