

# Writing persuasive copy

## James Kelly reports from a Guardian Masterclass seminar on copywriting and explains how the insights it offered will help him in his translating work



James Kelly is a full-time translator working from Spanish into English and is also studying for a PhD in literary translation at the University of Edinburgh.

The best translators are also good writers, an observation that is particularly relevant when it comes to creative texts in fields such as marketing. With this in mind and having recently started working with a new client in the travel sector, I decided to book a place on Writing Persuasive Copy, a one-day workshop run by Barnaby Benson, founder of one of the UK's leading copywriting firms, under the auspices of the Guardian Masterclass series, which offers a wide range of seminars and workshops on a variety of subjects for writers from various walks of life. Despite being specifically targeted at copywriters, the workshop provided a powerful glimpse into the creation of marketing texts and was rich in insights when it comes to their translation.

The day was divided into three sessions: defining goals and writing for different media; understanding audiences and motivating them to change; and a hands-on session covering some basic copywriting techniques. The first session began by discussing the different goals of copy, ranging from raising awareness and brand positioning all the way through to sales conversion,

touching on the considerations to be taken into account for different types of media, such as email, social media, blogs and advertising.

### Target audience

After a coffee break, the second session began and we spent the next hour and a half building up an in-depth understanding of our target audience and desired impact with a view to deriving a specific marketing brief. Here, the importance of

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specificity and getting the brief right cannot be stressed enough, being an essential prerequisite to ensuring the message is clear, focused and achieves the desired effect. Working based on one of our own assignments, by the end of the session we were able to summarise our brief using a structured question to focus our minds (for example: using a magazine article, how can I raise awareness of X hotels by conveying luxury, relaxation and exclusive destinations in order to transform a limited awareness of X into a desire to return to one of X's hotels or try other X destinations?).

Here, it's worth noting that while this work will most likely have been

done by the copywriter of the source text, it is nonetheless extremely useful for translators to be able to build up a picture of the original brief to have in mind when working on their translation.

### Nitty-gritty

After an excellent lunch in the Guardian canteen, we finally got down to the nitty-gritty of writing our specific text. Barnaby introduced us to a range of techniques and considerations for writing good copy, many of which are directly applicable to translation. In this respect, some of the most important considerations were writing as we would speak, finding powerful images to visualise what we are trying to say (which may vary across languages and cultures), using simple language, and aspects such as varying sentence type (eg loose, periodic and balanced) and tone of voice. However, for me, perhaps one of the most useful techniques was what I have called the 'random word technique', an excellent way to break free from clichés in headings and titles (see box). Finally, the course was wrapped up with time for us to work on some of our individual projects, with Barnaby on hand to offer feedback on a one-to-one basis.

While some of the techniques covered, particularly those of a more conceptual nature, may not have been directly relevant to translation, the information was nonetheless extremely useful because it helped the attendees to understand what makes good copy. In this respect, a view from the other side of the fence can help translators identify and enhance key aspects of the source text, creating additional value for their clients by delivering more persuasive translations. This was my first time attending a Guardian Masterclass; however, I was highly impressed and will be sure to keep an eye out for any future workshops that might be relevant to the areas in which I work. 

### Random word headings

- Pick a random word such as 'painting' (it doesn't have to be related to the text you are working on and it's arguably better if it isn't).
- Spend a few minutes brainstorming related words (eg portrait, landscape, history, composition, art, brush, stroke...).
- Use one of these words to construct your heading. (eg 'X hotels: the art of lasting memories').