

The case for long copy

As communications technology evolves at an ever-increasing pace and more products and services compete for attention from consumers, there are those who are sounding the death knell for long copy. Again and again, we are told “Nobody reads anymore” and “Long copy is dead” because technology reduces attention spans.

But there isn't as much unanimity on that point as some may think. There are [studies](#) claiming that attention spans have shrunk to as little as five minutes, but many academics [scoff](#) at such conclusions, contending that the idea of an “average attention span” is a meaningless, artificial distinction. Instead, they consider context. In other words, our attention spans are dependent upon the tasks that we take on. And there are still others who argue that smart phones, tablets and laptops convey instant gratification that warp our perceptions of time.

Few would deny there is a trend toward shorter copy, infographics, and video, but there remain plenty of instances where longer copy is necessary. A friend of mine who is also a writer used to keep a sign in his workspace that read “Nothing Happens Until Someone Sells Something.” That might sound like a line from Glengarry Glen Ross or Mad Men, but it also points to the essence of human communications. When we interact we “sell” ideas to each other. We intuitively try, through words, to persuade someone else to take some action to buy our product, buy our idea, or buy in to our project. Sometimes it is easy to sell something in a few words, but sometimes it requires telling a story.



Assume you are writing ad copy for a local hospital that has acquired an expensive new diagnostic tool. The hospital wants to promote the service now available to the community they serve. Should you describe the device and its attributes, or do you tell the compelling story of someone (like the audience you are trying to connect with) who might have died but for the care they received thanks to the new device?

I argue that you do both. Start with the dramatic human success story, which draws the reader in, then go to the unique selling proposition of the equipment. What does the state-of-the-art device do that hasn't been available to the community before? How conveniently does it do it? How effective – or even cost effective – is it?

Here at Cowley, we've also seen fit to employ and have had great success with long copy in non-profit fundraising applications such as capital campaigns for clients like [Notre Dame High School](#), [Bishop Grimes Jr/Sr High School](#), [Loretto](#), and the [Seward House Museum](#).

The ubiquity of social media is almost always blamed when people talk about reduced attention spans, but social media is also a place where compelling long copy

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is alive and well. An ad that caught my eye recently on Facebook featured nearly 600 words! (Yes, it's by another firm: We're big enough to give kudos to a competitor.) Here's a taste of the opening text:

"Let's skip the fluff. You're running ads wrong.

Take this ad for example – There's a few reasons it's different...

First of all – It's not asking for a single thing...

It's not even selling you something.

It's about GIVING you something.

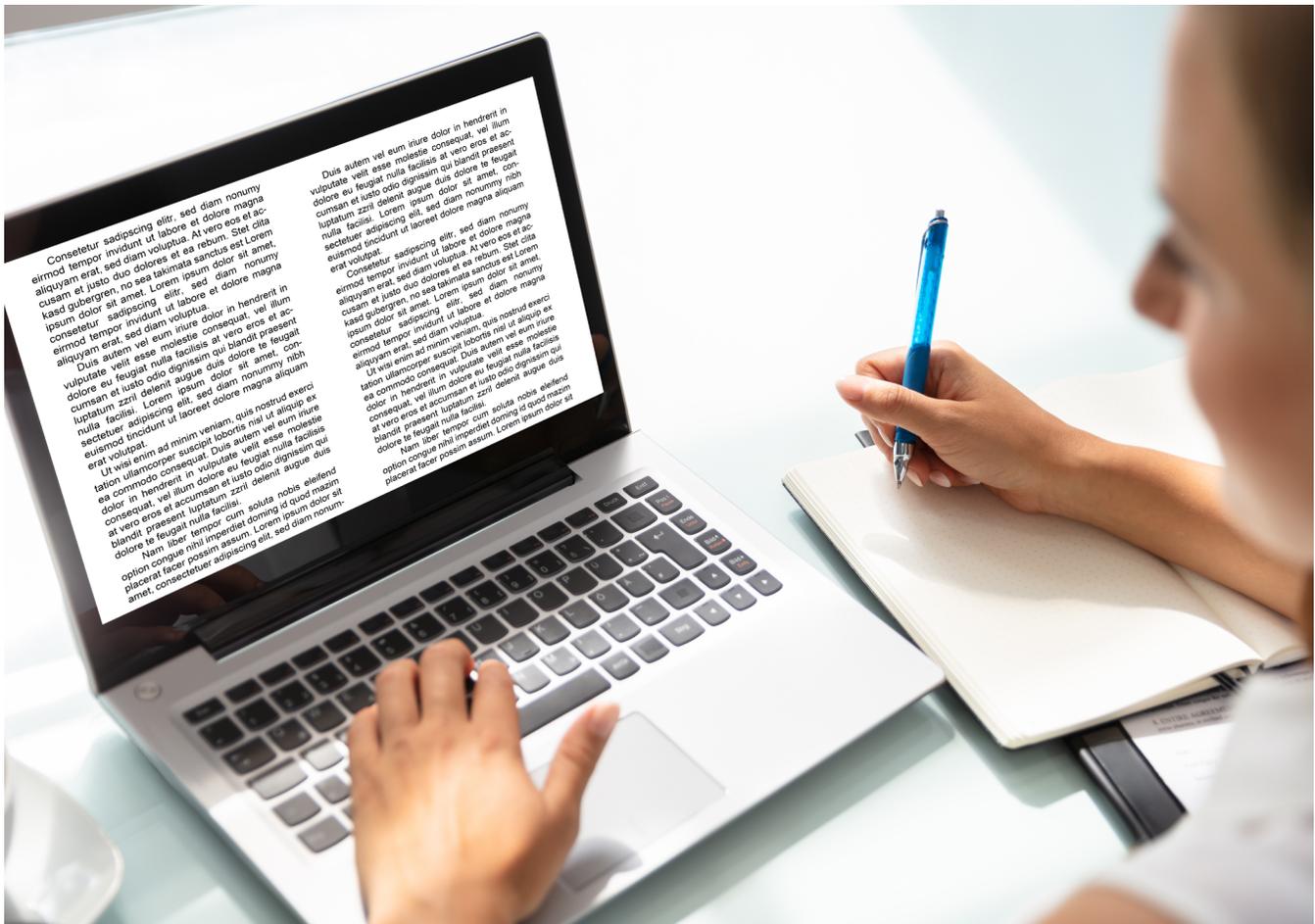
More on that in a moment.

Secondly – it got you to stop scrolling and start reading.

And if we're being honest here..."

Each sentence serves as a cliffhanger that makes you want to keep reading to the end.

So, let's not say so long to long copy just yet. There are times — indeed lots of them — when long-form text is alive and well!



If you need compelling copywriting – be it long, short, or somewhere in between – reach out to Gail Cowley today at 315-475-8453 extension 1 or via email at gcowley@cowleyweb.com.