

Proofing to improve your credibility

It seems not a day goes by without me spotting at least one typo or other error in blog posts, newsletters and other communications (generally the digital type). I've even seen errors on the chyrons for the local news.



Here's a sampling from the past couple of weeks:

In a sub-headline on a TV news website, it said **baht** instead of bath (and spellcheck didn't pick it up because baht is the currency in Thailand).

On a headline on WETA's Tellyvisions blog, there's mention regarding the new season of a show called **Saniton** (which, in actuality is called Sanditon). (I just checked and this typo has been fixed).

In a newsletter from a restaurant it says a new menu will debut on **Wedensday**.

The call-to-action button on a communications agency's newsletter says, "Read the full case study on our **wesite**."

Those are glaringly obvious typos. There are many other not-so-glaring mistakes on stuff such as grammar (e.g., using the wrong pronouns or having a dangling modifier) and wrong information (e.g., saying an event is taking place on Tuesday when it is really taking place on Thursday).

It's human to make mistakes. We all do it. But when you make mistakes on professional or official communications, it undermines your credibility. It makes you look unprofessional, and sometimes it makes you look ignorant.

This need for checking your work is summarized beautifully in the The Freelance Creative article "Why Marketing Writers and Editors Need to Master Fact-Checking" when it says:

"The more reliable and high-quality [the content] is for readers, the more it confers trust in and value of the brand behind it," Dimond said. "If a reader can't depend on the basic facts of a blog post, it's a clear message that they can't trust the brand."

In other words, copy that is accurate and error-free helps build your brand. Yet lately, I've noticed more mistakes than ever. It seems nobody is bothering to proofread, let alone fact check or copy edit.

What is causing this?

I think there are three reasons that account for the avalanche of mistakes I've seen lately:

1. Speed

The biggest culprit is most likely speed. People are under pressure to get things done quickly, at the pace of social media. But rushing to get a newsletter out or post an article invariably leads to sloppy or no proofreading.

2. You don't know what you don't know and you don't even know to ask

I got a newsletter a few days ago from a journalist. In it, he writes he made a mistake spelling a subject's name in the previous day's newsletter, something which was pointed out to him by a reader. This says to me that this journalist didn't even do basic fact checking (e.g., Google subject's name to see how it is spelled) nor had a copy editor look at his copy (copy editors routinely check spelling and other facts).

3. Lack of quality control

Too many times people overestimate their abilities and don't take the step to have another person read/proof their work. Sometimes, there simply is no process in place to create a quality check before a communication goes out to the public.

Bottom line

Mistakes hurt your credibility. You can minimize the damage by creating a proofreading/fact checking/copy editing process that you follow before sending or publishing every single piece of public communication.

Poor grammar is poor communication part 3

Grammar matters

This is a lawn sign that has appeared around my neighborhood:



Lawn sign

I believe what they meant to say was “No Townhouses on Historic Chestnut Lodge.” Or maybe they meant to say “Not More Townhouses on Historic Chestnut Lodge,” which would still be awkward. I am not sure. Perhaps the people behind this campaign were not sure either. But what I do know is that this sign is wrong.

It's spelled A-L-A-N

U.K's Vision Express had a major typo, transposing the L and A, in a letter to a customer. It was quite insulting. You have to read this Daily Mail article to see what I mean, but suffice it to say, a proofreader would have saved the day. (Thanks to Leslie O'Flahavan for sharing the article on her company's Facebook feed.)

Copy edit your work, or at least, do some proofreading

Having poor grammar, or a typo (or two or three) in your marketing materials is poor communication. Your message will

be muddled and any mistakes will distract from what you are trying to say.

Typos and grammatical mistakes are fixable, and if you don't catch them in time, they can be costly. There is a solution and that is to copy edit *and* proofread your written materials.

Watch this space next week for the next On Writing interview, with a pro who certainly knows that grammar and spelling matter.