How to Craft Compelling Calls to Action for Your Content

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The purpose of online content is to inspire visitors to take some form of action. The almighty call to action (CTA) is an essential ingredient in all copywriting — arguably the most important element for any content creator or marketer with an end goal in mind. A strong CTA ties everything up in a neat bow for your readers… and shows them a path forward.

I'd even go so far as to say if you don't have good CTAs, your website won't be successful. Your emails will languish. And your client will get crabby. Let's start with the basics.

What is a CTA?

A CTA is a word or phrase that informs your prospect what to do next. They often appear as clickable buttons — though they can also show up within content in text links.

Types of CTAs

CTA Phrases — These are concise and often short sets of words that encourage immediate action, such as "Buy now," or "Sign up today." They look like this:

image by drip

CTA Statements — These are lengthier and more detailed, usually made up of a sentence or a few sentences, such as *"Join our exclusive membership program today to enjoy early access to premium content, special discounts, and personalized recommendations."*

Here's an example of a statement CTA that was used within a longer article aimed at marketers who want to build their value:

Click here to sharpen your skills with the help of our content marketing workbook.

Whether you use a phrase or statement depends on the context, platform, target audience, and specific goals of your marketing message.

Visitors will likely see far more than a single CTA as they are guided along a standard marketing funnel or Spiderweb content marketing path . Each touch point is meant to bring them closer to becoming a customer… and that means each touch point has a CTA guiding them to the next step in the path. CTAs can be incorporated into multiple platforms and formats, such as blogs, long-form articles, social posts, newsletters, emails, or almost any other type of messaging.

To be at their most effective, your CTAs need to be clear, natural sounding, and compelling… and those are just the basics. There are several things you can do to make your CTAs shine!

Creating personable CTAs through research

Ideas for CTAs will come more easily if you have done your homework in the discovery phase with your client. When you have a deep understanding of your audience, you can craft CTAs that feel more personalized… that read like you know what your visitor is thinking. Here are some novel examples, including the one below. While the "subscribe" button could be far stronger, the preceding copy makes it work. I wish I had thought of it for my own CTA!

Pain point targeting taken to the next level.

3 things that will set you up for CTA success

Before you start writing your CTA, make sure you know a few things about your client and their audience… specifically

1. your client's goal,
2. their unique selling proposition (USP), and
3. the target audience who will benefit from the USP.

Let's say your client makes hypoallergenic sheets for people who suffer from allergies. You have a very defined product and target audience. I won't go so far as to suggest "Stop Snot" for a CTA, but you get the idea of how precise you can be with your messaging.

Getting started

Even with due diligence, it's not always easy to think of an original, sassy, or enticing CTA. Honestly, the oft-used Shop News, Sign Ups, and Learn Mores of the internet can feel like a YAWN, though they are still effective for some audiences.

But, if you can stand out from this standard fare, you will be ahead of the game.

Now that I've asked you to do your research, I'm flipping the switch and saying don't overthink. With the knowledge you gleaned about your audience, try a stream-of-consciousness approach. Write down every CTA idea that comes to mind, just as you likely do in any rough draft. You may surprise yourself. Here are a few of mine — no judging:

- Click it! Click it good!
- Whoop!
- I'm in!
- Can't wait
- Heck yeah
- Get happy

Remember that effective CTAs don't exist in a vacuum. They must appear within quality content to give your visitor a reason for wanting to take the next step to get the information or product they want.

Psych 101

The best CTAs employ not only action verbs but basic psychology. When your website is competing with a billion others, you need to give visitors a strong reason to hand you their personal information or invest their money. By discussing psychology in marketing, I am not endorsing trying to manipulate people with subconscious trickery. The following insights are simply helpful, researched tips for you to better understand how most people think when you are trying to communicate. Let's take a closer look.

11 ways to strengthen your CTA

1. Build trust — Offer no-strings trials, free information, or other benefits without a sales pitch. This approach is often accompanied by the "Learn More" CTA, which appeals to a user's desire for information without triggering their commitment phobia.

Visitors are not as stressed about clicking on a button like this, because they understand there won't be an initial layout of cash for products or services. By the time they encounter another CTA that asks for some type of investment, they will have enough knowledge to know if they want to make a purchase.

2. Ease anxiety — Minimizing risk alleviates your user's fears and hesitations during the buying process and encourages them to buy or sign up. The word "Free" is powerful. "Learn More" isn't scary. Who doesn't want to take a test-drive or understand more before deciding on a purchase? Speaking of which, "Take a test-drive" is a more creative way to say those things. Just as trying on a pair of shoes in an honest-to-goodness brick-and-mortar store is less risky than buying online — so is the chance to trial any product or service.

Adding the word "Try" to almost any CTA increases the confidence of the prospect. It's a softer term that suggests little risk. "Try now for free" is pretty appealing.

"See" is also a useful way to combat commitment anxiety. It sounds so much easier than "buy" or "subscribe." "See" is a discovery-oriented approach that relies on piquing curiosity. "See how it works" appeals to the desire for a test-drive before buying.

3. Create a sense of urgency — Limited-time or limited-quantity offers are one way to do this. Use this approach only if the offer *is* truly limited. This tactic has been proven to work, but it should be used carefully to avoid alienating prospects.

I get miffed if I feel overly pressured or manipulated by a time limit or a marketer's attempt to induce the fear of missing out (FOMO) in me. In most cases, I won't take action because of it.

You can combine a limited offer with a free trial window or a money-back guarantee to ease that feeling of pressure. When a business does that, my guard, and that of most prospects, comes tumbling down.

4. Offer immediate gratification — Those seeking immediate satisfaction respond to the words "Now" and "Today" coupled with the object of their desire. This is typically used when your call to action is to place an order for a product or service.

If you can promise your reader will receive something right away, they'll be more likely to convert. Offering bonuses or benefits is also a good incentive. You can reference bonuses in your CTA. For example, "Buy now and receive 2 months free."

5. Focus on benefits and value — You've likely heard the term "What's in it for me?" Psychologically speaking, users aren't interested in bells and whistles [features] as much as how those bells and whistles help them solve problems.

Incorporate solutions into your CTA. Saying "Never get lost again" has more appeal than "Get our GPS app." A button that says "Shave time off your commute" is more personal than "Read our timesaving tips." Create a CTA that focuses on results, and you'll see more clicks.

6. Choose your placement carefully — Your CTA should be visible, attractive, obviously clickable, and preferably above the fold.

You have choices in formatting. You could use a "welcome mat" (a larger area above the fold). The benefit of adding a mat is that your visitor won't leave the page before seeing your CTA. Welcome mats are less invasive than pop-up boxes, but there is a scenario to be wary of when employing them.

Visitors may not stick around for the rest of your page unless they are highly motivated to click your opening CTA. For this reason, mats work best for landing pages (rather than homepages) because visitors who "land there" are already primed to buy. They don't necessarily need to peruse the rest of a website page. Here's what a welcome mat looks like — using a unique CTA:

7. Use color— In addition to simply helping your visitor find your CTA easily on a page, colors influence mood at the subconscious level.

Many colors have meanings associated with them. Overall, green means "go." Blues are soothing. Black is sophisticated. Orange and yellow are vibrant and energetic. Purple is luxurious. Pink is feminine. Surprisingly, red performs very well as a CTA — even though it's correlated with danger, anger, and "Stop!" Apparently, it also conveys dominance, and perhaps that's its power.

If you are writing for a particular culture or geographical location, be sure to research your colors. For example, in North American culture purple is often correlated with luxury, yet in Brazil, it's associated with death.

Online, you are communicating through visuals, words, and sound, so be sure to use colors that evoke the mood you want your visitors to feel when reading your content.

8. Repeat yourself — Human brains recognize patterns and themes… and when they do, it helps speed processing. Repetition can help you write more effectively. For instance, if you write keywords or phrases that include "Save money" throughout your copy, by the time a visitor arrives at the CTA button, their brain has incorporated the idea that clicking will improve their bottom line.

9. Employ the human touch — Address your visitors in the first person or by name in emails to make them feel more connected. This has become very important with the rise of AI. One CTA that is now quite successful is "Talk to a human" rather than something like "Book a demo" or "Chat with our bot." Using the first person, you could try something like "Send me [insert product] promo."

10. Pair emotional benefits with action words — Offer a desirable benefit from the product or service to make your CTA more effective. An emotional pull might be something like "Tired of being left out? Experience our community platform."

11. Make it mobile-friendly — Always confirm that your CTA is easy to find and easy to click for mobile users. Preview your pages in mobile view to be sure your CTAs are easily visible on the smaller screen, because the presentation can vary from desktops or tablets.

Mobile users have the ability to place a call from the device they're shopping with, and 80% of mobile searches for local businesses convert. Consider including clickable phone numbers on your landing pages. This is when something as basic as "Call now" can be a very successful CTA.

A few parting thoughts

Keep it simple. Don't overwhelm your visitors. Too many CTAs can make them bounce without engaging at all. When faced with so many shiny objects to choose from, people can get decision paralysis — which is the kiss of death for marketers.

Make sure your primary CTA is immediately visible and easy to understand, free of other elements to distract your prospect. Usually, a primary CTA and a secondary choice are more than enough. This could look like offering an informational video to watch, followed by a CTA button.

The goal of any CTA is to appeal to your readers in a way that moves them forward on the buyer's journey. You will be incredibly valuable to clients if you can consistently take a prospect to the finish line!

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