

Please Do Not Read This

Recently I enjoyed a long lunch with my friend Jonathan Kranz, author of *Writing Copy for Dummies*. We shared a few secrets about creating great Web site copy.

Interestingly, we both had strong evidence that “negative” Web headlines and links often generate lots more clicks than “positive” ones. For example, on my blog *Web Ink Now* (www.webinknow.com), my *Worst Practices* category gets more clicks than almost any other area of the site.

I remember several years ago I helped build a site where we included a link “For Executives Only” and this generated much more traffic than any other self-select paths on the site. It turns out people react to negatives. Words like “Worst”, “Not”, “Don’t”, and “Only” are interesting and people want to know what’s there.

Jonathan experienced the same phenomenon with a link on his Web site: “10 Important Reasons NOT to Hire Me” which he writes about in a great post “The Power of Negative Thinking” on his *Kranz on Copy* blog.

Jonathan says: “that negative word, “NOT,” attracts attention. Some people wonder why I would deliberately discourage business. More experienced marketers understand that I’m qualifying my prospects, and come to see how I manage it. Others are simply curious.”

Jonathan recommends, “One of the truly beautiful features of the Web is that it allows us to experiment with content then gather immediate, measurable results -- practically for free. Try it yourself. Take something such as, “8 Ways You Can Increase Sales” and flip it on its head. With the amazing power of negative thinking, it becomes, “8 Ways You Undermine Sales, Discourage Customers and Reduce Revenue.” Then watch what happens to your click-through rates.”

While the “negative” technique most certainly works, it should be used sparingly. Only one negative link is appropriate on a site. And don't forget -- there must be something compelling and interesting to read once people click! Don't promise something interesting with a negative headline and then fail to deliver.