

Writing about a product in your own words

Forty dealers publishing the manufacturer's description word for word is forty pages that rank nowhere and say nothing. What to write instead, and where to start.

The short version

When a manufacturer announces a product, it sends every dealer the same description. Most of us paste it straight in. The result is forty specialist retailers publishing word-for-word identical pages, all competing for the same searches, none of them saying anything the others do not.

Search engines resolve that by picking one — usually the manufacturer, sometimes a large retailer — and largely ignoring the rest. So the page you copied costs you the search you wanted, and tells the customer nothing they could not read anywhere else.

THE WHOLE ARGUMENT IN ONE LINE

You cannot out-describe the manufacturer, and you should not try. **What you have that they do not is a room, a pair of ears and an opinion.** That is the page worth writing, and it is the only one nobody else can publish.

Keep the specifications exactly as supplied

One important exception before anything else. **Do not rewrite the numbers.** Power output, dimensions, weight, impedance, supported formats, finishes — reproduce those precisely as the manufacturer states them, and never estimate, round or infer one that is not published.

Getting a specification wrong is worse than having no page at all: it produces returns, arguments, and a customer who no longer believes anything else you told them. If you cannot confirm a figure from the manufacturer's own material, leave it out.

The prose around the numbers is where your work goes. The numbers themselves are not yours to improve.

What to write instead

Five questions. Answer them honestly and you have a page nobody can copy, because the answers come from having the thing in the building.

- 01 **What does it actually sound like?** Not “warm, detailed and musical” — every product ever made has been described that way. What did you notice in the first ten minutes? What surprised you? What did it do that the obvious alternative did not?

- 02 **Who is it for, and who is it not for?** Naming the customer it does not suit is the most persuasive thing on the page. It is also the rarest, which is precisely why it is believed.
- 03 **What does it need around it?** A speaker that wants more power than most people expect. A turntable that repays a better cartridge. A streamer that needs a wired connection. This is the knowledge customers cannot get anywhere else and the reason they should buy from a specialist.
- 04 **What would you compare it to?** Two or three real alternatives at similar money, and what the difference actually is. Fear of losing the sale to the comparison is misplaced — they are making that comparison anyway, elsewhere, without you.
- 05 **Why is it in your shop?** You chose to stock it over the alternatives. Say why. That sentence is worth more than three paragraphs of adjectives.

How it should read

- **Like you talking.** If you would not say it across the counter, do not write it. Read it aloud — the sentences you stumble over are the ones to cut.
- **Short.** Three hundred honest words beat a thousand borrowed ones. Nobody has ever complained that a product page was too brief.
- **Specific.** “The bass goes lower than the cabinet suggests” is worth more than “outstanding low-frequency performance”, which is worth nothing.
- **Without the adjectives everyone uses.** Stunning, breathtaking, reference, audiophile-grade, game-changing. They are invisible from overuse and their absence makes everything around them more credible.

ON REVIEW QUOTES

Do not lift passages from published reviews onto your pages. The text belongs to the magazine, not to the manufacturer and not to you, and permission is rarely what people assume it is. Link to the review instead — it is more useful to the customer and it costs you nothing.

Where to start, when there are hundreds

Nobody rewrites an entire catalogue. Work in the order that pays:

- 01 **The products you actually sell most of.** Not the dearest — the ones that genuinely move.
- 02 **The ones Search Console says people already find you for.** Guide 02 shows you where to look. Improving a page you already rank for is the shortest route to more enquiries.
- 03 **Anything used or part-exchange.** These are unique to you by definition, so there is no manufacturer copy to fall back on and no competition for the search. They are also the easiest to write: condition, history, what it came in against, why it is good value.
- 04 **Brands you want to be known for.** If you want to be the shop people associate with a particular make, the pages have to say something.

One product page a week is fifty a year, and fifty good pages will out-perform five hundred copied ones.

A word on writing tools

The obvious shortcut is to have a machine write these. It is worth understanding exactly what that does and does not solve.

It does solve the blank page, and it will tidy your grammar. It does not know what the thing sounds like in your room, which customer it suits, or why you chose to stock it — and those are the entire value of the page. Left to itself it produces exactly the fluent, adjective-heavy, interchangeable prose this guide is arguing against, and it will confidently invent a specification if you let it.

Used well, it takes your rough notes and tidies them. Used badly, it replaces the manufacturer's identical copy with a different kind of identical copy. The test is simple: **if the finished page contains no sentence that could only have been written by someone who had the product in the building, start again.**

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

A customer reads your page, learns something they did not know, and comes to you rather than to the cheapest listing — because your page was the only one that sounded like it came from somebody who had heard the thing. That is the entire commercial case for a specialist retailer, written down on one product page at a time.

ALSO IN THIS SERIES

02 Knowing what your website is actually doing — how to find which pages to rewrite first.

04 Photographing your shop and your stock on a phone — the picture that goes with the words.

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