THE NINE SACRED PRINCIPLES OF **BADASS** B2B WEB COPY

A treatise for B2B marketers, copywriters, and anyone else responsible for putting words on business-to-business websites.

R Radix Communications

B2B web copy needs a slap.

Life is too short for weak B2B web copy.

It's too short for identikit tones of voice.

For text that doesn't get to the point.

(And especially for text that doesn't *have* a point.)

For "we ought to say something about that" content.

For 300+ words when 100 will do, "because Google".

For pages that are worthless containers for other pages.

For "enough about me; let's talk about me".

And for having to guess what you're supposed to do next.

Life's too short for any of that. Too short to read it and — especially — too short to write it.

Right now, in B2B tech, this is what we're stuck with. But we can change it.

You can change it.

It takes a choice, and a little commitment. You decide to stop producing weak, aimless web copy just because someone told you to. You make a stand. You get a bit more... *badass*.

And before you type word one, you devote yourself to **nine sacred principles**.

Let us begin.

Lesson 1: Clarity
Get the job done.

First things first. Think of some examples of web copy — in fact, any copy at all — that strike you as truly *badass*. What do they have in common?

They do the job they set out to do.

So. Before you even start writing, work out what that job is. What is this page — this *particular* page — for?

Every web page has a purpose in life, or at least it should. In practice, most pages you'll see don't. Presumably, they were written because "we ought to have something about that department" or "we think people care about what we think"… but anyway. Give every web page a job, and keep that job in mind when you're writing it, and straight away you're starting with an advantage over maybe 95%[1] of pages on the internet.
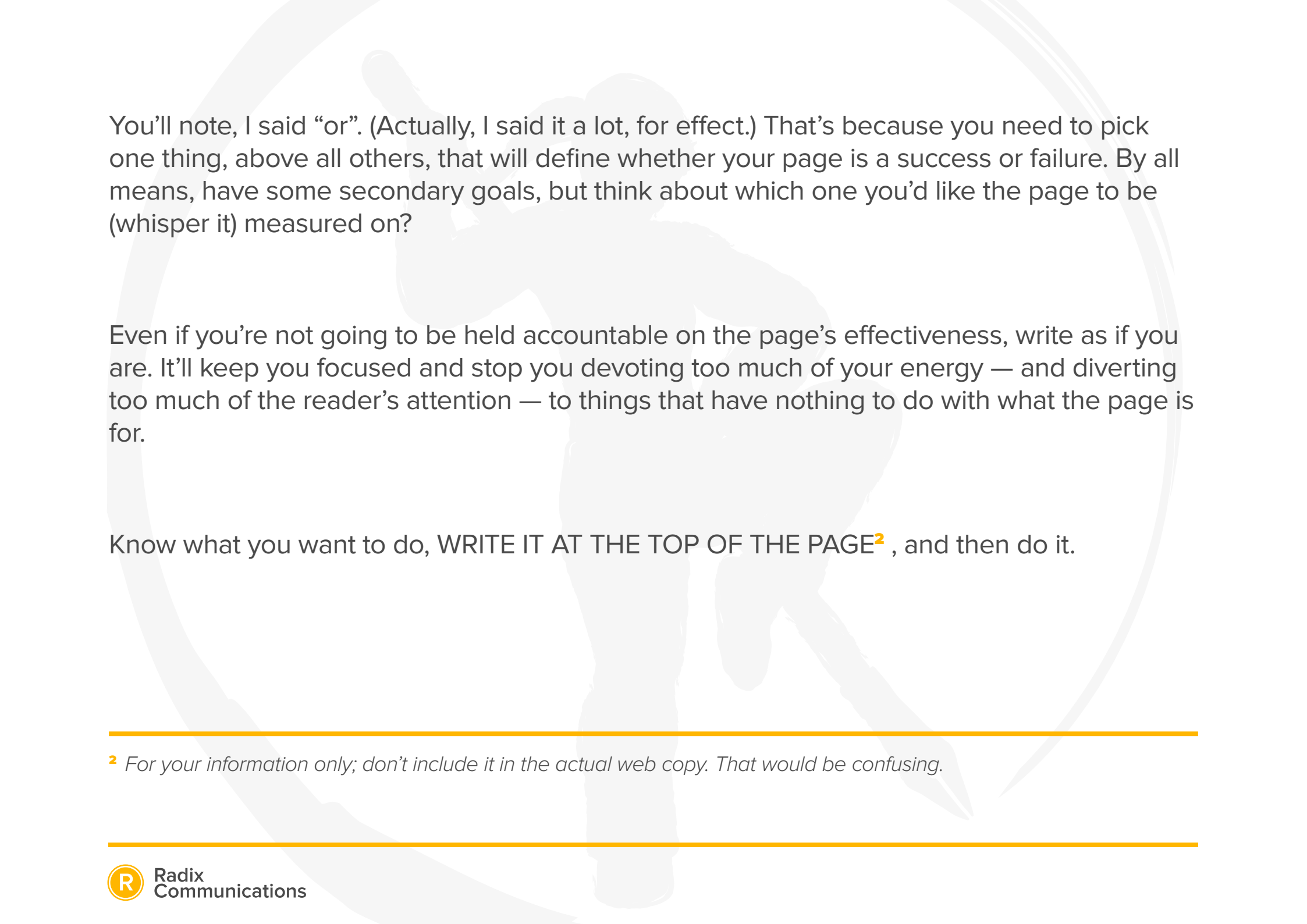
[1] *95% is a total guess, obviously. It's not an empirical fact. The point is, more often than you'd think, you'll find the page doesn't have a reason to exist. Worse, people will expect you to write pages like that, too – either because it's what they're used to, or because a web structure schematic somewhere dictates it. In particular, look out for "branch" pages, which often serve no purpose except to be vaguely themed containers for links to other pages. Life – both yours and your readers' – is too short to write or read pages like that. Hunt them down, and kill them without mercy. The internet will thank you.*

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For example, in a B2B context, that job might be something like:

- **Attracting** people from Google, and giving them useful information, *or*

- **Convincing** people to download an asset, *or*

- **Selling** a product, *or*

- **Reassuring** the reader that you know what you're doing, *or*

- **Presenting** some important facts and figures, *or*

- **Helping** an engineer get their head around the technical implications, *or*

- **Enabling** someone to tick a box when they're shortlisting potential suppliers, *or*

- **Prompting** the reader to call your sales team.

You'll note, I said "or". (Actually, I said it a lot, for effect.) That's because you need to pick one thing, above all others, that will define whether your page is a success or failure. By all means, have some secondary goals, but think about which one you'd like the page to be (whisper it) measured on?

Even if you're not going to be held accountable on the page's effectiveness, write as if you are. It'll keep you focused and stop you devoting too much of your energy — and diverting too much of the reader's attention — to things that have nothing to do with what the page is for.

Know what you want to do, WRITE IT AT THE TOP OF THE PAGE[2] , and then do it.

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[2] *For your information only; don't include it in the actual web copy. That would be confusing.*

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Hey! wait a minute...

What even *is* a web page anyway?

If you've been paying attention so far, you might have noticed that I'm referring to "web pages" like they're one kind of writing... when actually they're nothing of the sort.

Although you do still see the classic 200-300 word page of copy, with a heading, standfirst and subheads — maybe some cheeky bullet points thrown in for good measure — it's by no means the standard. One page of web copy might be almost anything.

Often, you'll be writing a series of panels, of maybe 20–100 words, each covering a different bit of your subject — and these can be almost anywhere in the design.

There could be a dozen or more on a really long page... adding up to hundreds of words of copy.

The important part is: these principles still apply — to the page as a whole, and often to each panel individually. Each part needs to deliver value. To do its job, on its own terms. To move the reader from where they are, to where they need to be before the next part takes over.

Treat the page as a page, and — if you're in any doubt — treat each panel as a page, too.

Lesson 2: Focus
One page at a time.

If the first page of copy your reader sees is weak, there are no second chances. There's a whole internet out there, and the "back" button is one click away. Nobody finding a page of crap web copy thinks "maybe the next page will be better". They're gone.

So assume the page you're working on right now is the only page in the world.

It's tempting to get distracted if you're writing more than one page, or even a whole site. Be relentless in your focus.

That means setting your stall out. Thinking about where the reader probably came from: did they arrive via the home page, and a bit of a browse — or did they parachute straight in from Google, without knowing anything about your company at all?

Where are they going next?

Break down the purpose of the site, and look at the function of this particular page. What are you hoping to change or achieve by the time the reader has moved on to the next one?

Now, make sure this one page has everything it needs to achieve that goal.

What that probably doesn't mean:
You need to fill the page with enough STUFF to take your reader from knowing absolutely nothing to salivating to buy from you, all in one go. B2B buying usually takes a little while, and several sources of information.

What that might well mean:
You need to set realistic goals for what one page of web copy can achieve. Selling from scratch in one page does happen, but it's rarely a B2B thing. You're more likely to see it in, say, a landing page for a B2C Google Shopping campaign.

One page, to complete one job.

Lesson 3: Perspective
It's not about you.

Often, a company's website structure matches their own organisational structure exactly — with one section or page for each department — regardless of whether or not it makes any sense for someone to find information that way.

Assuming your website is about you is a rookie mistake. Your website is about the visitor.

It's the same with the copy on that page you're writing. You might think it's about a product, or a service, or a success story... but that stuff is only ever relevant so far as it affects your reader[3].

If the information you're sharing doesn't actually make a material difference to their world, why on earth are you telling them? Who else would the page be for?

[3] *It's astonishing how much web content exists "just because". Whole pages of information that nobody will ever want to read, presumably because "we ought to have it online". Be aware of this impulse. Sneak up on it, and beat it to death with a brick.*

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So, focus on your reader. Gather up what you know about them. In B2B, this might include:

- Where they work

- What job they do

- What that means their needs and concerns are

- What they know about your business or sector

- What context they're likely to be reading in

- With what technology

- How they're feeling[4]

- What language they use.

(Go back and read the last two again. They're important — because they're the starting point for your own language choices.)

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[4] *Don't tell me that this is touchy-feely psychobabble, that it doesn't matter, or that you couldn't possibly know. I'm talking about how the reader is feeling in the context of the piece you're writing. You wouldn't use the same voice for an apology, error message or legal document as you would for an invitation, confirmation text or needlessly self-important eBook. Not unless you're a total arse, anyway.*

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Now — and yes, I'm quite serious about this – print out a picture of that person (or what you imagine they look like). Put it up near your desk. And write to them. That one person. Not a demographic, or a group, or an amorphous, faceless crowd. One person.

Tell that one person what they need to know on that one page, to achieve your one job.

About "about"
Even your "about us" page is not about you. This is one of the most read pages on any site, so you need to make it count — and that means thinking really hard about what the page is for, and how the information you share affects your reader. (Hint: what the page is for is almost certainly not "just saying some stuff about the company".)

Lesson 4: Kindness
Solve the problem.

Usually, people go to the internet because they have a problem.

Maybe they're looking for a better way to send invoices. Maybe they need cheaper copier paper. Maybe they have a deep, dark secret they can't tell their family, their colleagues, or their doctor. Maybe they want to know your phone number, or your hours of business. Maybe they're just bored.

But when they get to that web page you're writing, they want something. Your job is to work out what it is, and then give it to them. That's what makes your content valuable.

It'll also help you to get the best from Google – because one of the reasons why Google is so popular is that, when you want something, it will usually bring you the page you were looking for.

So write the page your customer is looking for. Easy.

All you need to do now is work out what they're looking for. This takes a little intuition — but the beauty of the internet is it's awash with data, and that data can give away clues if you stare at it long enough:

Your own web analytics are a good place to start. Which pages do people arrive at, where do they go and — assuming Google sees fit to tell you – which search terms did they use to get there?

If you have a search box, it's always useful to know what people type into it — you get an instant view of what they want from your site, what they can't find in the navigation, and the language they use. But most companies never look — many don't even collect the data.

And the usual searchspects are always useful, to give you a broader idea of what people are looking for. These days you need to scrape together a picture from a lot of small bits, but try Google's autocomplete suggestions, Keyword Planner, Google Trends – whatever data you can get your grubby mitts on will help you build an understanding.

Once you have as many clues as you can get, use a bit of intuition to figure out what might be motivating that one person to visit that one page, and — whatever else you do — give them what they came for.

Lesson 5: Empathy
Write for people. Not Google.

Not so long ago, the defining quality of any web page was what Google thought of it. Your search ranking was all that mattered. And so you had to feed Google with keywords and anchor text and all those other morsels it liked[5].

But Google doesn't buy your stuff. People do.

And as Google has improved its algorithms — its understanding of what a page is about, and what web user wants — things have (thankfully) started to change a bit. So now, there's a crucial difference.

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[5] *Imagine Audrey II, but in the form of a very popular search engine. Basically that.*

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These days, we don't write for Google; we write for the human beings who *use* Google.

(Specifically, write for the right human beings – the ones for whom that particular page is relevant and useful. Why would you want to waste your time – and everyone else's – scaling the heights of the internet to attract a whole bunch of people who'll never buy from you? More of this in lesson 6.)

The difference is surprisingly subtle. For instance, if your web page's job involves attracting some people from Google...

You still need to think about keywords — but now, it's partly because those are the words your visitor is using. You have a direct insight into their own language, and of course it makes sense to reflect that back to them.

Meta data is still important — but now, we need to craft the Title and Description tags so they stand out on the Search Engine Result Page, and tell a human pair of eyes "pick this one". In many cases, they're the first words a future customer will ever see from your brand, so they need to be chosen with care (not just stuck together by an SEO technician)[6].

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[6] *Meta titles work best when SEO and copywriting professionals work together, to arrive at something they're both happy with. At the time of writing, meta descriptions carry no search weight at all, so they're a pure copywriting job. Go hog wild.*

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Think about how you personally use the internet — and Google in particular. Or imagine you're the customer. Be realistic, and brutally honest. Once you've searched, which link do you pick, and why?

When the one person you're writing for searches for the one thing they need to solve the one problem your page addresses, what do you think they want to see in their search engine results? Write that.

Social media users need love too
If it's at all likely that the page you're writing will be shared on social media, familiarise yourself with the various tags controlling what that looks like, because that copy might want shaping too. But be aware: there are rules to that game (like not using brand names in titles), so look them up first.

Lesson 6: Integrity
No surprises.

When you've searched online, and you click through from Google, how long do you wait before deciding whether or not to click "back" and look at the next link down... two seconds? Three?

That person you're writing for.
They've been tempted by that copy you wrote.
The copy describing that exact page.
The page they were looking for when they searched.

So now, you need to deliver that page.

There is absolutely never even the slightest bit of point in trying to trick anybody into coming to your web page (whether from meta data, an adwords ad, an email, whatever). It wastes your time, it wastes their time, and they'll end up hating you a little bit. It is utterly self-defeating.

But people do it. So when they arrive on your page, they'll be wary. New web visitors are flighty things: one false move, and you'll spook them.

Your job now is to immediately make them feel at home. Help them to see, straight away, that they are in the right place. This is the place they're looking for. They can relax, settle in, and have a read.

That means your headline — and your standfirst (if you have one — otherwise your first two lines of body copy) absolutely have to deliver.

Usually, for a copywriter, that means "don't try to be clever". Put the wordplay down (and for God's sake back away from the puns) and do the Ronseal thing[7].

More often than not, you could do a lot worse than making the main page heading the exact same wording as you used in your meta title (or the link on your email, or ad copy, or whatever brought them here). They liked those words enough to click them, after all.

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[7] *Say exactly what's in the tin. Or, in this case, on the page.*

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Only change that wording if you can improve on it. It's not laziness; it's common sense.

Likewise, make your first 20 words a concise, clear, compelling version of the entire point of your page. No funny business, setting up the body copy. Just get to the point... like, imagine you're about to die, and you have five seconds to tell them the most important thing. That.

Once you've done that important bit, and they've settled in, then you can be clever (if you absolutely must).

Lesson 7: Consistency
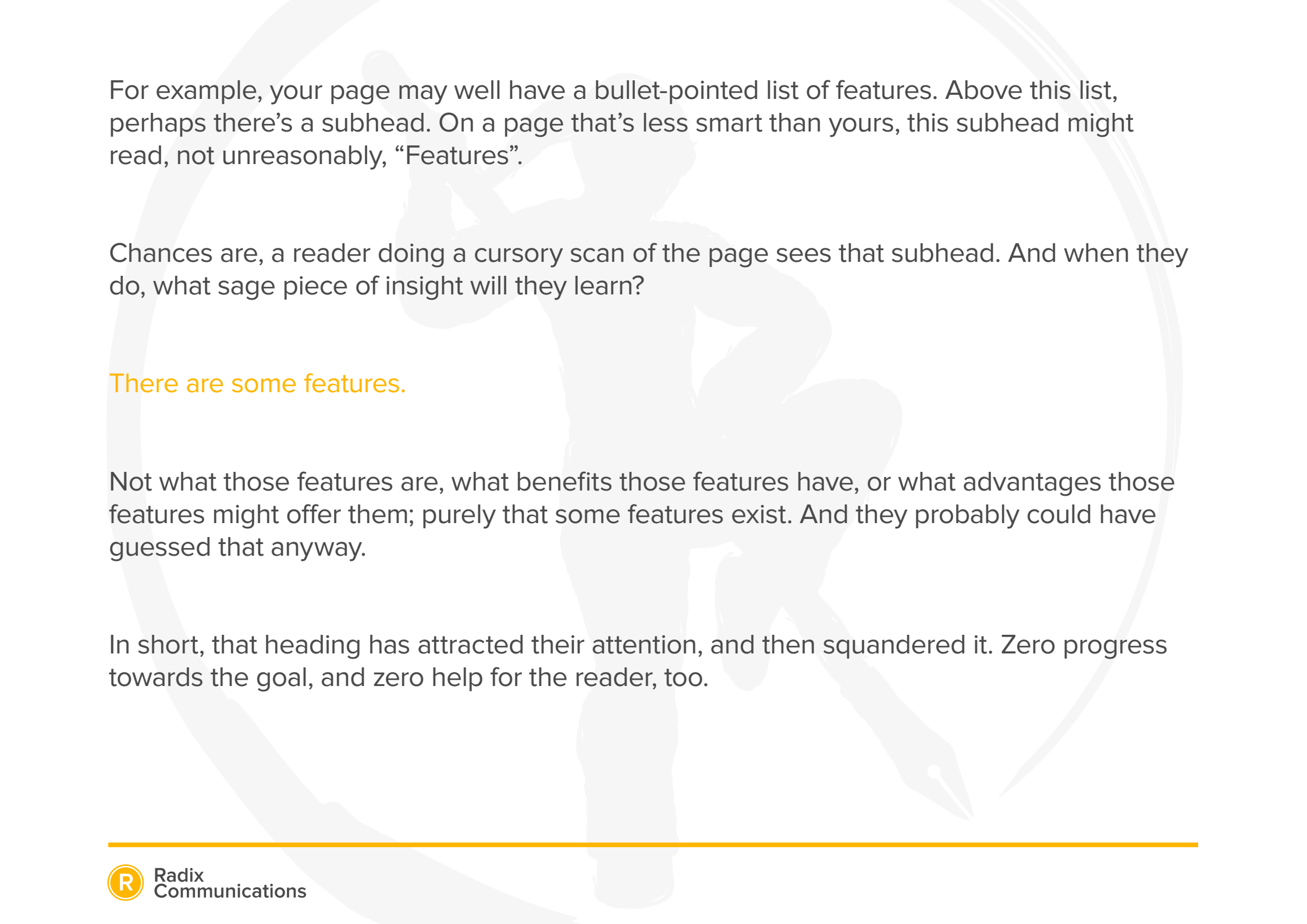## Always add value.

Now, think about what you do in the seconds after you've decided that maybe this is the web page for you, after all.

You scan down the page, right? Let your eyes flick over the bullet points, subheadings, pictures and captions, get a sense of what's going on... and maybe zoom in on an interesting bit and have a little read.

Only then do you start at the top and read down. Maybe.

So in between the five-second version (see lesson 6), and the full, extended version-with-everything-chips-and-garlic-mayo-on-top, there's a level of reading which takes maybe thirty seconds or a minute. Your web copy needs to work on that level too.

How do you do that? Simple. You make sure every individual part of the page tells the reader something of value — something that helps the page to do achieve the thing you wrote it for.
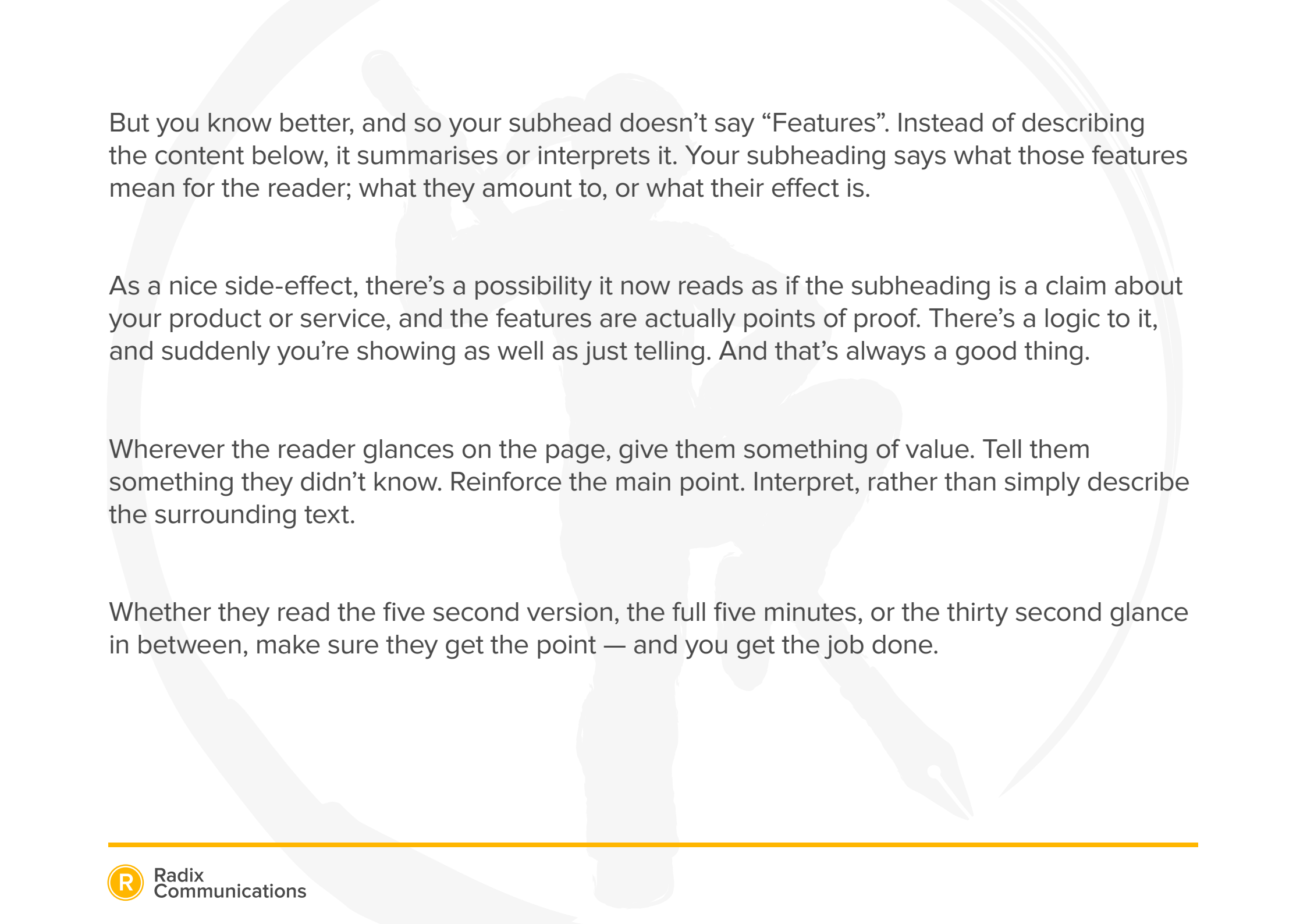
For example, your page may well have a bullet-pointed list of features. Above this list, perhaps there's a subhead. On a page that's less smart than yours, this subhead might read, not unreasonably, "Features".

Chances are, a reader doing a cursory scan of the page sees that subhead. And when they do, what sage piece of insight will they learn?

There are some features.

Not what those features are, what benefits those features have, or what advantages those features might offer them; purely that some features exist. And they probably could have guessed that anyway.

In short, that heading has attracted their attention, and then squandered it. Zero progress towards the goal, and zero help for the reader, too.

But you know better, and so your subhead doesn't say "Features". Instead of describing the content below, it summarises or interprets it. Your subheading says what those features mean for the reader; what they amount to, or what their effect is.

As a nice side-effect, there's a possibility it now reads as if the subheading is a claim about your product or service, and the features are actually points of proof. There's a logic to it, and suddenly you're showing as well as just telling. And that's always a good thing.

Wherever the reader glances on the page, give them something of value. Tell them something they didn't know. Reinforce the main point. Interpret, rather than simply describe the surrounding text.

Whether they read the five second version, the full five minutes, or the thirty second glance in between, make sure they get the point — and you get the job done.

Lesson 8: Prescience
Know what's next.

Like any good agent, a badass web copywriter always knows where the exits are. It's astonishing how many web pages just stop — with no sense of where the reader might want to go next, or how they can take action.

So, before you even start writing, know what their next step is — or is likely to be. Writing without that information is like getting into a car and simply driving, just because, and seeing where the road takes you (the results are seldom are interesting as you might think). It's aimless.

You're departing A... so know where B is.

Importantly, the reader's next step needs to be natural. It should be somewhere or something you could reasonably expect that they might actually want to go or do. As much as you might wish they'd drop your sales team an email straight away, or register for your fabulous newsletter, they might have other ideas.

If you can make it that the thing they naturally want to do is the thing you'd like them to do too, then bingo. Everyone's happy. But you need to be realistic about just how possible that is.

Also, it's going to take more than just a brilliant call to action button or prompt at the end to make that next step feel right. It takes all the text on the page. Which is why you, as the writer, need to keep that exit point in mind from the very first word.

Think about the funnel

Of course, there can be more than one possible next step from any page. Just how many options you give your reader depends on how advanced they are in their journey.

(Weirdly, the buyer's progression through a website is one area where a funnel metaphor actually does work pretty well — arguably, better than in sales and marketing as a whole[8].)

At the start, keep things broad. Your reader probably wants lots of options because they're information gathering — so lots of potential exits and next steps (e.g. other related blog posts).

But as they progressively get into sales-relevant information, you'll want to slim those options down. If they're on your contact page (or close to another desired outcome), this is really not the time to show them that awesome blog post on Ten Ways Your IT Infrastructure Is Like a Baby Panda.

(I don't care HOW good it is.)

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[8] *As a rule, the funnel metaphor is utter bobbins as a way to describe a sales process. In short: 1. Funnels benefit from gravity. What goes in the top naturally progresses onwards. 2. The sides of a funnel aren't porous, which would mean you can't lose any sales. 3. There's only one route through a funnel. Would that it were so simple in B2B sales and marketing.*

Lesson 9: Patience
First things last.

Maria von Trapp didn't know what she was talking about. The very beginning is a terrible place to start.

Take your web copywriting project. Say it's a whole site's worth of copy, more or less. Where do you begin? Just because the home page is the first thing you see on the site[9], doesn't mean it has to be the first thing you write.

In fact, it should be the last.

[9] *Even this is an old-fashioned, almost pre-Google way of thinking about a website. Like it's a brochure. You know, a brochure? No? OK, ask your parents. Your grandparents. Maybe they remember seeing one once.*

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Think about it. Your web page should be the perfect summary of the site – driving home the one, key message you need to deliver to get the job done. You might also want to tempt the visitor with a few, select highlights from your stellar content that are relevant to the your most important personas.

Well, that's an awful lot easier once that content has actually been written. And likewise, writing an entire site's worth of content is a great way to really hone the key messages until they're razor-sharp – and ready to sit at the front end of the site, in plain public view.

So start with the details. The leaves of the tree. The pages with really small, specific jobs — individual products, services or pieces of information. Then work your way back up along the branches — and only then let yourself think about the big, high-profile stuff.

It's the same on each page. You'll find those all-important first 20 words much easier to write when you know exactly what they'll be introducing. And the subheads and captions that summarise and interpret their surrounding text so well will all tie in a lot better when that text's already written.

There's no rule saying where you need to start. So pick somewhere sensible, like...

A single page

With a single purpose

And a clear target audience

Where you know what they want

And can deliver it

Using words they'll recognise

All over the page

To get them to an obvious outcome, that feels natural.

Got that? Good.

Now... **begin**.

OK, so now what?

Well, the flippant thing would be to say "go out and write some badass B2B web copy". And if you feel ready for that, then go ahead. Having read this, you've already given it more thought than half the sites out there[10].

But maybe you don't feel quite so happy to crack on. That's OK. There's a lot to remember.

In that case, you have a couple of options:

1.   We have lots more advice on becoming a completely badass B2B copywriter. Videos, blog posts, a hierarchy of competences, you name it. Have a browse around the Radix blog, maybe sign up for the email update. Learn a few things. It can't hurt.

2.   You could hire Radix to write the copy for you. We do it all the time, and we're really very good (and much more succinct than this ebook would suggest, I promise). Also, because there are loads of us, it'll probably get done quicker. You'll find our contact details around here somewhere – but hey: you didn't download this document to get a sales pitch, so I'll leave that thought here.

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[10] *You must promise to email me a link to the finished product, though. I'm on a mission to rid the world of thoughtless B2B copy, so seeing your considered pages of properly thought-out text will be a tonic. I hope.*

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You've mastered the sacred principles, and now I charge you with a sacred quest.

Go and make the B2B internet a better place.

Friendlier.

More audience-focused.

Easier to read.

Between us all, we can make it happen.

(Lord knows, it needs to.)

The nine sacred principles of
BADASS B2B WEB COPY

1.   Clarity. Get the job done.

Decide on the one job your page of web copy absolutely has to achieve. Write it at the top of the page, and then do it.

2.   Focus. One page at a time.

A site is only as good as its weakest page. So act as if the page – or panel – you're writing is the only one in the world.

3.   Perspective. It's not about you.

Have a clear idea of who's reading your page, how they got there, and – most importantly – what they want. Write for them, not you.

4.   Kindness. Solve the problem.

Every web visitor who's reading your page is there because they need something. Use data to work out what it is, and help them.

5.   Empathy. Write for people (not Google).

Ask yourself why someone would use a particular search term. What page would they most want to see? Write that page.

6.   Integrity. No surprises.

You have about two seconds to show your web visitor they're on the right page. Deliver on your promises, and do it fast.

7.   Consistency. Always add value.

Wherever your reader looks – every sub-heading, bullet and caption – tell them something helpful and consistent.

8.   Prescience. Know what's next.

Right from the start, understand where you want your user to go after they've finished reading. Make the next step natural.

9.   Patience. First things last.

Start your web project with the detailed stuff, then work backwards to the home page. You'll know what you're writing about.

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Now go forth, and use your power for good.

When you're ready for more, come to https://radix-communications.com/insights/.