

MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS WHITE PAPER—SEPT. 2014

The Value of Proofreading

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THE VALUE OF PROOFREADING

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You can find mistakes even in good periodicals and newspapers these days. Perhaps you've seen errors like these: "there" for "their," "it's" for "its," "then" for "than," "compliment" for "complement," "the Capital" for "the Capitol" or "Columbia" for "Colombia." Perhaps you've seen a word duplicated ("the the") or a phrase that makes no sense even after you've read it two or three times, although all the words are spelled correctly. If the purpose of anything you write is to communicate (i.e., to connect with your audience), then mistakes like this may well, at the least, slow your reader down, and at the worst they may cause your reader to stop reading. That's why you need a proofreader.

Proofreading, first of all, involves checking the typeset copy against the manuscript letter for letter and character for character, making sure nothing has been dropped out or duplicated. For something like an annual report, it involves checking all of the design specs: fonts, point size and lead, folios, running heads, margins, gutters, proper centering, spacing of all elements for consistency etc. Proofreading is not copyediting; it does not involve rewriting your copy, tallying the numbers in tables or fact checking. However, your proofreader is likely, at the very least, to flag for you inconsistencies in spelling or treatment, passages that don't make sense or are very unclear, punctuation that is substandard (or missing) or incorrect facts and wrong dates for commonly known items that he or she has happened to find. (The American Civil War did not begin in 1761.)

Technology has, in certain ways, made us dumber. Spell check programs are wonderful and useful tools, but they cannot replace the alert human mind that can weigh connotations and understand the usage of a word or phrase in context. There is a world of difference between "a man-eating shark" (an angry great white) and "a man eating shark" (a fellow dining on a mako steak). None of the mistakes noted in the first paragraph above would come up as errors in spell check because each is spelled correctly.

Companies sometimes think that proofreading is not essential because there is "expert software" like spell check or grammar check (which many people who understand it view as flawed at best) to take up the slack, so to speak, and save costs in printing. Is this a fair assumption? Consider the effects of letting errors go that a good proofreader would have caught. Errors reflect badly on your company and brand. Why would careful readers (they still exist) care to do business with a company that isn't attentive to detail in its printed materials? In this culture, your readers are bombarded with information from all sides. Readers who see unclear wording or mistakes in your writing are likely to be turned off and stop reading. Communication is lost. The potential sale is gone.

Proofreading is quality assurance for anything that involves words. Is it cost-effective to have your print materials proofread? Consider these questions: What is the cost of sloppy or flawed publications on your corporate credibility, which you've tried so hard to maintain? What is the result of not effectively communicating with your audience or customers? What is the cost of a reprint?