

Headlines To Catch Customers

I talk about headlines a lot. All my marketing books have information about creating good headlines. But it still seems to be the hardest thing to actually do well in marketing. Headlines are how you catch the attention of that person you want as a customer. He's distracted and busy and jaded and it takes a lot to get his attention. Your headline has to be relevant to what he wants-- in other words-- it must be very exciting to him or he won't even notice.

How do you do that? Well, let me give you some examples first, and then we'll talk about the process.

Kodak could tell you "Buy our film for great pictures." Instead all their advertising shows memorable events in your life--the places you'd want to take pictures for MEMORIES--weddings, graduations, new babies. They are making it relevant, focusing on how their film makes your hopes come true.

An aquarium advertised this way, "Watch our fish swim." (boring) Buried in their ad about half way down, was a line that said, "Touch a live shark!" That would have been a far better headline.

(Boring) Fine, fresh codfish

"The largest, sweetest, absolutely the best codfish ever caught, with scales the size of quarters and meat as white as snow."

(Boring headline) Low fat meat for better health:

Get the meat that's heart healthy and tastes yummy, too!

Want a smaller waistline with bigger portions?

(Boring headline) New Kids for your farm

"Love and better nutrition for your family in one terrific package!"

"More dependable income than Wall Street investments? Maybe so!!

Yes, there's more work, but a lot more fun, too!"

(Boring) Show winning genetics

"How we brought home six blue ribbons"

"You bet the head of the class is more fun! Here's how!"

When you are trying to write a headline, whether it's for a flyer, an ad, your website, a press release or any other promotion, here're a few ideas that I think might help.

1. Start by thinking **not** how great your product or animal is. Tell them how great it will make *them*.

2. Fill in your 'thing' in the following sentence:

"You get _____ and it does _____ for you so that you get (have, feel, experience) _____ (you can keep going here till you run out of things it does for them)

3. Be thinking about the hopes that your customers have.

4. Use emotional words and action words.

5. Tell them something they don't know.

6. Be descriptive.

Practice writing headlines using many different ideas. Before you send out a press release or finish that ad you're writing, practice a whole page of possible headlines. Ask someone else to pick which is the most exciting.

Begin your headline with words that have announcement quality such as Introducing____ , Just Invented (or born)____, Presenting the Latest____, At Last ____ .

It is not necessary to be cute when writing headlines since straightforward statements can be powerful.

Use a sub-headline to strengthen the headline, drawing the readers into the rest of the copy where you repeat the benefits.

Make your message clear and compelling by beginning your headline with the words **How To...** (How to Make Money With Goats), **Why** (Why Your Marketing Isn't Working) or **Which** (Which of These Skills Do You Need?).

A headline technique with proven effectiveness is to offer advice (Advice to Mom's With Allergic babies). The word *advice* suggests that the readers will discover some useful information if they read further.

A useful headline approach is to play directly upon the emotions of the readers: (Here's Help When Diagnosing Illnesses Leaves you Baffled). An emotional headline doesn't necessarily have any direct-selling value, but it makes an emotional appeal that involves the reader. This approach can be used well with testimonials.

An emotional quote from a person in your field can add credibility to your message (I Hadn't Sold a Single Animal until I Hired Ellie to Write my Ads).

An effective emotional headline tells the reader that you understand his or her frustrations. (For the Producer Who Hasn't Won a Blue Ribbon Yet)

One intriguing headline technique is to offer a challenge (Can You Pass This Parasite Test?).

Be specific in headlines. Replace 'many' or 'lots' with a number or a percentage. Replace 'it's been said' with the exact quote and who said it. Replace generic or general words with words that give exact information. Replace 'fashion' with 'business casual fashion' or 'black tie fashion.' Replace 'quality' with the measure you're using to determine quality (milk production in pounds, show wins, vitamin content, Evaluation score, etc.)

Your promise should be specific. Here's what I can do for you. Then provide evidence that you really can.

A Rhyme can make your message stick. Can you finish this jingle? "You'll wonder where the yellow went....." (When you brush your teeth with Pepsodent) or "Winstons taste good....." (Like a cigarette should). The rhyme makes them "sticky!" Even decades later.

This headline about a good-natured arm wrestling contest over an advertising slogan between the CEOs of Southwest Airlines and Stevens Aviation got a lot of attention: "Malice in Dallas."

Headlines send a message about you, too. What message do these headlines send?

Going out of Business Sale.	We've failed
Herd Reduction	We don't know how to market so we have too many
For Sale	It's all about me, I don't care about my reader
Our Sales list is ready	It's all about us, we don't care about our reader
Make an Offer	We have no idea what he's worth and we're desperate
Such-and such sire and dam	We assume you know as much as we do about genetics

Besides sending a negative message about you, the above headlines are BORING, without any hook to catch attention and just plain bad marketing. You can do better. Practice!

Five times as many people read the headline than read the copy. Make headlines exciting so more will!

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Making Money With Goats, 6th Edition 2007
Marketing Farm Products: And How to Thrive Beyond the Sidewalk, 2nd edition 2009
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