

NINE GOOD HEADLINES AND WHY THEY WERE SO PROFITABLE

By Ernie Nicastro

Whether you're writing a sales letter, advertisement, billboard or press release, the headline determines whether your prospect will read your material or immediately throw it away.

*"The purpose of a headline is to pick out people you can interest For the entire return from an ad depends on attracting the right sort of readers The best of salesmanship has no chance whatever unless we get a hearing." — From the timeless classic, **Scientific Advertising**, by legendary adman **Claude Hopkins***

Make no mistake about it, as a business owner or copywriter; you must have the ability to write compelling, attention-grabbing headlines that get prospects to read your ads. It is one of the most valuable skills you can possess. The simple truth of the matter is this: You have absolutely zero chance of closing the sale unless you "get a hearing" with the prospect. So a good headline, an effective headline, should capture and hold the prospect's attention and give you an opportunity to make your presentation.

How You Can Learn To Write More Effective Headlines

Whatever profession you're in, no matter how good you are, you can learn to be better by studying the methods and mechanics of people who are the best at what they do in your line of work. This is especially true if your line of work includes writing effective ad copy. There are books and magazine articles aplenty that have word-for-word, picture-for-picture reproductions of highly successful (i.e. profitable) ads and sales letters. In virtually every case, there is also expert commentary about what it was that made the ad or sales letter effective.

Here, I humbly offer my contribution to this body of work.

1. They Laughed When I Sat Down At the Piano . . . But Then I Started to Play!

The granddaddy of great advertising headlines; often imitated but rarely equaled. Is there anyone among us who has never longed for or relished an opportunity — when people doubt our ability — to prove them wrong? Plus, people love to root for the underdog as the main character of this ad so obviously does. This is an action-oriented headline that promises an uplifting story, and we're compelled to read further. Also worth remembering: The before-and-after angle can be effective in many headlines.

2. A Little Mistake That Cost A Farmer \$3,000 A Year

A highly successful ad that ran in a number of farm magazines. An excellent idea of how sometimes the negative idea of offsetting, reducing or eliminating the risk of loss is even more attractive to the reader than the prospect of gain.

A fellow copywriter and good friend likes to illustrate this point with the following analogy: Imagine its 3:00 in the morning and your best friend comes banging on your front door.

"Bill, Bill, wake up! I know how we can both make an extra \$500 apiece today — guaranteed!" Chances are, this would be a severe test of your friendship, and there would be little interest on your part.

On the other hand, let's say that same friend came banging on your door at 3:00 in the morning, except this time he's saying, "Bill, Bill, wake up! Somebody's in your driveway stealing the hubcaps off your car!" You wouldn't mind that interruption at all, would you? In fact, you'd be grateful you had such a thoughtful friend. That's because human nature is such that people will fight much harder to avoid losing something they already own than to gain something of greater value they do not own.

Another key factor in this ad's success is the attraction of the specific. Note that it wasn't just a mistake; it was a little mistake. What farmer could pass up reading the copy under such a headline? What farmer wouldn't be compelled to find out: "What was the little mistake? Am I making it? If I am making it, how much could it be costing me?"

3. How To Win Friends And Influence People

Yes, the title of the book was also the headline for the ad that sold a million books via mail order in less than three years during the latter part of the Great Depression. The key to this ad's success is its strong basic appeal. Who doesn't want to know how to win friends and influence people? The key words are "how to." Without these two words, the ad lacks power, punch and, most importantly, the promise of a benefit to the reader.

Certain words and phrases are inherently involving and attention grabbing and can be used effectively in just about any headline. Such words and phrases include:

- How To, How, Here's
- Why, Which, Who Else, Where, When, What
- These, This, Which of These

For better advertising results, look for a way to use these and other effective words in your headlines.

4. "I'm impressed — Shell's Caprinus R Oil 40 keeps my EMD's in better condition than any other oil I've used in 20 years."

"They say" advertising copy has substantially greater impact than "we say" advertising. That's why the above testimonial quote makes a highly effective headline for this business-to-business advertising effort. Above the headline is a four-color photo of the man who provided the quote. He's standing in the engine room, and he's identified as A. E. "Bud" Dacus, chief engineer for the company. The first two paragraphs of the ad's body copy continue in the same vein as the testimonial headline. Do you think we have some believability and credibility working here? You bet we do!

Testimonial headlines can help your ads generate a high response, particularly when they come from recognized experts in well-known companies. Be sure you stay close to your customers and regularly spend time reading the mail they send you. You just might find an excellent headline, a natural and highly believable spokesperson and the basis for a very profitable ad campaign.

5. "If you were given \$4,000,000 to spend — isn't this the kind of Health Club you'd build?" Interrogative headlines like this help entice readers into the copy, and there are many ways they can be put to effective use. This headline is a self-incriminating and highly adaptable technique to have readers help specify what they would value most in such a product. The copy follows through along these lines: Surely you would put this feature into it. You would be sure that it brought you this advantage — and so on. The payoff to the ad is: "We've already done it all for you."

Below are more interrogative headlines:

6. "Do You Make These Mistakes In English?"

This is a direct challenge made provocative and effective with the inclusion of one vital word: "these." "What are these particular mistakes? Do I make them? How can I avoid them?" Notice the promise to provide the reader with helpful information.

7. "Do You Do Any of These Ten Embarrassing Things?"

This question is similar to number six as it preys on our insecurities and makes us wonder, "Which ten are they? Do I do any of them?" The bottom line is, "I better read and find out."

8. "How Much Is "Worker Tension" Costing Your Company?"

This one uses a similar approach to number seven, this time from a business-to-business perspective. Notice the quotation marks around the words "worker tension." Don't they add a certain element of intrigue?

9. "Six Types of Investors — Which Group Are You In?"

And finally, this headline appeals to our innate curiosity about ourselves.

These last five headlines all have similar characteristics. And one factor that comes through loud and clear is that they are all written from one primary viewpoint: "The point of you." Each of them, in fact, contains some version of the word "you."

Even though millions of words have already been written about the point of you, let me remind you again to always keep your prospects and customers at the front and center of all advertising you do. By doing this, your ad will get the hearing you deserve.

Coffee News of Scottsdale can bring your business "NEW BUSINESS".

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