

## The Top Thirteen Mistakes in Preparing a Sales Letter

### 1. Poor Headline. Or what's even worse, no headline.

The most important part of sales letters is the headline. Unless the headline immediately attracts attention and generates interest, your prospect will stop reading right then and there. This means you have no chance--zero--to fulfill the purpose of the sales letter, which is to make a sale. Your headline should communicate the strongest customer benefit(s) of your product or service.

TIP: Creating a great headline. This is entirely contrary to what many “experts” say, but it is what most experts do!

Headlines are critically important and yes you can spend hours, days, even weeks if necessary, creating headlines and then testing one headline against another. You can create at least 15 to 25 and test the strongest ones. You can write as many as 200 to 250 before choosing two to four to test against each other to find the most profitable.

Or you can do what most copywriters do when they critic someone’s copy. They read the copy and pick out a biggest benefit and make it the headline. Then they look for one or two other big benefits and make them sub-headlines. Here’s an Example:

“How To Get a **New Roof,**  
**And a FREE 42” Flat Screen TV** Just in time for the Big Game”  
*I Really Don’t Want to Lay Off My Crew this Winter*  
**I only Have 10 TVs – Call Now To Be Sure Your Get Yours!**

### 2. Copy is full of "Me" messages.

Some examples: My products are terrific. My company is wonderful. We've been in business for 15 years. We have a long tradition of quality, blah, blah, blah.

So much advertising is full of this drivel. This is all about you. No one in the world cares besides yourself. Your prospects want to know exactly what benefits they will get from your products. In other words, if you sell grass seed, don't dwell on what it's composed of. Instead describe how beautiful their lawn will be.

TIP: Here is the fastest way to improve your copy. Review the first draft of your copy. Eliminate all these words--I, our, we, my. Substitute you and your. I promise you'll be amazed and truly gratified with the result. It's sure to blow your mind!

### 3. Copy fails to answer the question "What's in it for me?"

The process, of course, starts with the headline. An excellent copywriting technique is to prepare bullet points. These should consist of all the benefits a buyer of your product will get.

Tip: Your benefits should be stated in headline format. The secret of making benefits even more powerful is to describe the benefit of the benefit.

#### **4. Exaggerated Claims.**

Many copywriters and marketers think the more astonishing your claims are, the more persuasive. This is a fallacy. If a claim is exaggerated, it seems and feels untrue. You thus lose that all-important credibility.

Tip: First you should dramatize your advertising claims with the help of short emotional words. Then prove each claim. Expert comments and testimonials can be a big help. Give a reason why.

In the headline above the roofer is giving away a big screen TV because his crew usually doesn't do anything in January and February and his suppliers are slow also. He explains that in the letter.

#### **5. Confusing offer.**

So many sales letters do not make a clear, easily understandable offer. The result is few or no orders. Reason? When consumers are confused, they don't act--they do nothing. Confusion always breeds inaction.

Tip: Think through your offer very carefully and write it down before you prepare a single word of your sales letter.

#### **6. Copy is too short. As the old saying goes, "The more you tell, the more you sell."**

Tell the complete story of your product. Include every benefit you can. Copy can never be too long. Some of my sales letters are as long as 56 pages.

**But** you can be too boring. The biggest sin of any copywriter, even in a two-paragraph letter, is to bore the prospect. The secret is to tell a complete story, but in the fewest words possible. Eliminate every single unnecessary word.

Tip: Write only to those who are interested in what you are selling. Do not be concerned whatsoever with those who are not interested. Those who are interested need enough information to take the next step. Give it to them!

#### **7. Large blocks of copy and few subheads.**

Lengthy paragraphs without frequent subheads make copy intimidating to read. This discourages reading and response. Place at least two or three subheads on each page. Plus, keep paragraphs and sentences short. Paragraph length of no more than five sentences or less should be your goal. Some paragraphs can be one to three words.

Tip: When you write subheads, strive to make them short and benefit driven. If the subheads are well done, readers with short attention spans can simply read the headlines and subheads and make their buying decision on those alone.

### **8. No testimonials.**

Customers who rave about your product or service are extremely effective and should be included in every sales letter. The words from the mind and heart of customers build your credibility.

However, most marketers waste the potential impact of testimonials. Common mistakes include using initials rather than the full name, as well as omitting city and state or country.

Tip: When getting written permission to use a testimonial in advertising, also request a photo. Most will happily agree. Photos help to add power.

### **9. No money-back guarantee.**

Your response to any sales letter will be significantly higher if you include a money-back guarantee.

Tip: The longer the guarantee, the more sales and less returns or refunds requested. For example, 30 days works better than 10 days, 60 days works better than 30 days, etc. A full year "no quibble" guarantee works very well.

### **10. No P.S. The P.S. is the second most read part of any sales letter.**

Many people read the headline and then turn to the end of the letter to see who it's from when they read the P.S.

My strong recommendation is to never send out a letter of any kind without including a P.S. This includes personal letters. Make it a habit from which you never vary. So when you are writing to your mother, father or friend, end the letter with a P.S.

Tip: When preparing a P.S. for a sales letter, a good formula to follow is to simply restate the biggest benefit of the product, the guarantee and the offer. How about a second P.S.? So that's P.P.S. – Or even a third – P.P.P.S.

### **11. Write Like You Were Taught To Write in High School Composition.**

High School Composition has Absolutely-Nothing-TO-DO with effective sales letter writing. Oh no! I can't capitalize Absolutely Nothing in the middle of a sentence – and there's no rule about bolding what's-ever – and TO-DO certainly is not all caps! And my GOD what are all these dashes! Hey, only the G is capitalized in God. And what am I doing starting sentences and ending sentences with prepositions – Ohhhhhhhh – I got an F.

Get it? Most people's writing is boring and stuffy at best! Most people are not boring and stuffy. **Write like you speak! Punctuate for effect not to follow rules!**

Tip: Want to write a great sales letter! Sit down with a good friend and a tape recorder and tell him why you and your product are so great. Transcribe the tape – add the #1

Benefit at the top in a headline - and restate the biggest benefit, guarantee, and offer in the P.S. – You're done.

## 12. Trying to Do Too Much

You are not going to sell a house with a post card. But you may get someone to raise their hand and say I want to find out more about that house with a post card.

You should also try to do one thing and only one thing. If you want them to call you, everything should lead to them calling you. If you want them to send back a post card to get the free DVD, everything should be about getting the DVD.

Tip: Determine what you want to accomplish and be sure everything in the letter supports that one thing.

## 13. No Double Readership Path and Poor Cosmetics

There are two types of 'readers' who will read your sales letters, post cards, print ads, etc. - skimmers and readers. If your headline does its job (see rule #1), then the readers will read every word that write. Skimmers, will NOT. You want skimmers to be able to make a buying decision by just reading:

- The Headline
- Subheads
- Captions
- Order instructions
- P.S.

While they may not make the buying decision based on the 5 bullet points above, if you've told your story well enough with your headline, subheads, captions, order instructions and P.S. they will often go back and read the entire letter.

With that said, we can enhance the sections above, and our copy with cosmetics.

Cosmetics can be **bolds**, underlines, *italics*, CAPITALIZATION, a different font, SIZE, Colors, etc.

Cosmetics enhancements are used to increase readership among skimmers and help readers follow along. Cosmetics are used to cover key points and they make long copy seem shorter to the reader, and thus increase readership.

Tip: After you've written your sales letter, go through and use cosmetics to enhance your key points. The key points being your offer, reason why, guarantee(s), testimonial(s), deadline, and call to action. Then, have someone read just your headline, subheads, captions and cosmetic enhancements. If they can repeat your entire story just reading those areas, you've got yourself a double readership path with great cosmetics!