

Seven Ways To Boost Your Existing Headlines

... PLUS A TECHNIQUE FOR WRITING NEW ONES

Coming up with the winning headline can be hard work. Ideally you'd do your pre-writing research, identify your prospect's needs, your product's benefits - and ten headlines would virtually write themselves. All you'd have to do is choose the best.

But this is the REAL WORLD. You've got so much else to do. So when time is short, try these quick and easy ways to boost your existing headlines. Use them to get a 'lift' in sales when reprinting your current brochures, or revising a sales letter.

#1. Give the impression your product is NEW - even if it isn't

Broadly speaking, there are three categories of headline-appeal: (1) self-interest/benefit; (2) news; and (3) curiosity. This tip applies to category (2). Prefix your existing headline with the words 'Now Available!' and you'll attract the attention of many prospects who decide to read further, if only because they don't want to miss out on details of a 'new' product that might be relevant to them.

But what if your product isn't brand new? Don't worry. Firstly, you're not actually stating that the product is new, only that it's now available. So no lawyers will call... Secondly, most of your prospects - unless you mail the same lists time and time again - won't recall your previous mailing, or even be that familiar with your product. Remember: it's hard getting *anyone's* attention out there in the marketplace...

#2. Use a strong customer testimonial

Looking to reprint, but you've got no time to think up new headlines? Quick - look through your file of current testimonials. Is there something good you can lift out, word for word, and use as a substitute headline? If so, you're on your way. If you're already using one or more testimonials elsewhere in your leaflet, why not 'promote' it to a headline? You'll give it a much larger audience when you do so.

#3. Add quotation marks

No good testimonials available? Simply add inverted commas to your existing headline. This tried-and-tested device will boost readership and memory retention. That's because people generally attach greater value to what they're reading when they think it's from an independent third party.

#4. Add a 'flag' to the front of your existing headline, or put it on a separate line.

A 'flag' is a phrase calling for the immediate attention of a particular person. This device helps readers 'self-qualify' themselves to read further. They identify directly with the job title or other descriptive category being used, and therefore decide to read on. For example "Attention Private Client Stockbrokers!". Or, "Civil Engineers: How to...."

#5. Add more 'muscle' to your existing headline

Marketers often assume that headlines have to be short and sweet. Or that they can't be longer than one sentence. Not so. It's that short copy/long copy debate all over again - and the answer's much the same: if your headline is appropriate to the audience, carefully crafted, well written, and properly laid out on the page, then you'll get readers' attention.

So take a quick look at your existing headline. Is it too short to do justice to what you're trying to say? Could it be 'filled out' with a few extra, carefully selected adjectives or nouns that add oomph and boost readership? Perhaps a second sentence would help? Or you could even...

#6. Add a second headline, above or below your existing one

If you've got a lot to say - a complicated offer perhaps, or a benefit that can't be adequately expressed in 5 words - try using a second headline. It'll give you two bites at the attention cherry - particularly useful if you need two hooks because of the breadth of your target audience.

Just make sure both headlines are properly laid out, so the reader can quickly take in what you're trying to say. Use another colour for your second heading and/or a different point size.

#7. Put the emphasis on certain words

Focus the reader's attention on key words or phrases by underlining them, using bold or uppercase. NB: use this device VERY carefully - probably only one word per headline, or a maximum of two. As with body copy, the more words you treat in this way, the less the impact of each usage. So be judicious.

*** When you've only got 10 minutes to spare ***

^^^ The QUICK and EASY way to formulate new headlines ^^^

Now for the second part of what we promised last month. This technique will help you come up with better headlines when you're tackling an entirely new product or promotion, but haven't got much time to spare.

Before you start writing copy - but after you've done your copy platform research - quickly write out several 'how to...' headlines. These benefit-style headlines are the easiest to formulate, so you shouldn't need to spend much time thinking them up. Then go on to write the body copy.

NB: If you struggle to write 'how to...' headlines then you probably need to go back and spend a bit more time on your copy platform. Otherwise you'll also find it difficult to write your body copy. A little extra time spent in research can save you a lot of time spent staring at a blank computer screen!

Once you've written your first draft body copy, and your order form, go back to your original headlines and read them again. Do they look as good as they did when you first formulated them? If you've got one or two that you still like, then you're probably

looking at something close to your final headline. If not, then you should at least find that this list gets you off to a flying start when writing additional headlines.

An added bonus: writing out a list of 'how to...' headlines focuses your thinking on the principal reason(s) why prospects should buy your product or service -at the exact point when you're looking to write the bulk of your letter or brochure copy. So that should make the rest of your task easier.

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