



I was recently speaking to a group of marketers, or marketeers; you know like Mouseketeer or musketeers. Anyway, I found myself embroiled in discussion about the internet and all the amazing opportunities it provides for marketing i.e. blogging, newsletters, websites, social networks and it occurred to me that even with the leaps and bounds we've seen in how the message is spread the persistent method in which we consume the messages remains the same.

Oh sure, we are without doubt visual learners and in fact most of the marketing messages we receive are heavy on the visual side; but when it comes to internalizing what the message is we always fall back on the written word.

Now it doesn't matter if you are an advertising, sales or marketing professional or on the other side of the fence an entrepreneur; getting your message across whether in an ad, sales letter or brochure requires you to understand the ins and outs of being able to communicate your message in such a way that it will speak to and actually cause the reader or prospect to respond.

Most of you will immediately look to the visual aspect for what you are creating; hoping that it will draw the attention of the prospect for at least .7 seconds and further hold their attention long enough to get the message across.

For many more years than I care to admit, I stood at the ad desks looking through clipart for an idea to run with; Praying something would jump off the pages to inspire a great ad. At one point I began to develop a photographic memory of the books and could recall the month or issue in which I'd seen a great visual. And of course when I'd call the memory into action and relish the thought of using that great pic I'd seen months before in Clipper. I'd arrive at the issue only to find that there was a gaping hole where my dream clip used to be.

Ah those were the days of curse filled comp rooms buzzing with ad reps and edit types racing around with an Export "A" drooping from their lips or fishing out a line of type that the waxer had eaten; Waxing in those days had a whole different meaning. (but that's another book.)

As I matured in my craft I began to realize that in order to hold the attention of the prospect long enough to make the ad work it would require more than just the visual.

I'm not sure exactly at what point it dawned on me, although it could have been the summer I read the Exorcist on the train to Vancouver, that it was the written word that actually held the power to grasp and hold the attention of the reader.

Where to start?

Start with the Headline.

There is no doubt that the headline is almost the most important part of the puzzle. It's the one thing that grabs the attention and gets the prospect to read the rest of the copy. Aside from a strong visual it is the first thing that you see and is the key to getting past .7 seconds. (The standard amount of time the mind will invest in deciding to engage.) It is essential that you understand the tactics used to create a great headline, and why.

Its job is to be so compelling that it commands the reader to read more. Most importantly it must trigger the curiosity impulse. In other words it must be intriguing, interesting and compelling.

It's gotta scream, "Tell me more". It must snap the attention, send a message and entice the reader if it's going to work. Think about the cover of Maxim or Cosmo. That's the impact the headline needs to make.

Here's 7 crucial secrets to writing a great headline.

1. Be direct. This one is the straightforward approach so that the reader immediately knows that what you are selling is a great offer. "A Hair Restorer That Actually Works"
2. Followed directly by the indirect headline. It employs a subtle curiosity bending approach that makes them want to read more. Sometimes employs words that have a double meaning. "When Betty Jukes Sold Her House For \$220,000, She Made a \$20,000 Mistake"
3. The news headline. It's announcing or introducing a compelling idea that sounds like news. "At last! A breakthrough pain reliever. Head-On."
4. The How To headline. Usually begins with: How To, How, Because, Wanted, Who Else. Works because it sounds like anybody could do it or its quick and easy. "How To Lose 20 Pounds by Summer"
5. The urgency or command headline. Usually will trigger action on the part of the prospect. "Start Today" or "Call Right Now"
6. Headlines that ask a question. This one begs the prospect to find out the answer. "What good are Air Miles if you can't use them when you want?"
7. The referral or testimonial headline. Using the social proof or satisfied user clincher. You're not making it up; a satisfied customer actually said it. Works great "The Fat-Blaster Changed My Life"

Now take your offering (product or service) and the prospects needs, desires, cravings or wants and weave them together with the 7 secrets of headline writing.

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