

# Are Your Headlines Working for You?

By Heather Robson

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So you're in business, and sooner or later you are going to have to write something to advertise yourself. Even if you have the budget and can afford to hire someone to write copy for you, you need to know what to look for, so you can be certain you're getting your money's worth.

The most important piece of any advertising copy is the headline. Which makes sense because it's your draw. It's the first thing that the prospect sees and after reading it he makes his first decision to continue reading or to move on. A good headline can increase your response rate by up to 300 percent.

Good headlines need to identify your prospect, so she knows you are talking to her. If you have a product that will appeal to mothers with infants, you don't want to spend your precious words attracting wealthy, elderly gentlemen. So you need to be specific. For instance, say you are marketing a baby-proofing service. You could say:

"Make Your House a Safe Place to Live"

That'll attract anyone interested in safety, but it won't single out the people you really want to reach—parents with infants. Instead, something like...

"60% of Family Homes aren't Safe for Babies to Play In"

That is much more likely to grab the attention of your target group—parents with babies.

Another rule for headlines is that they need to stand out—they need to set themselves apart somehow. If the response of your prospect upon reading your headline is "Been There. Done that." then you've lost him. Instead your headline needs to make him think, "This is new." To use the above example, the first headline blends right in with every security company out there, not to mention any other service that can improve the safety of your home. The second headline, on the other hand, offers a new bit of information (which, by the way, I made up—it should go without saying that your headlines should be accurate). Hopefully parents will stop and think, "Wow, 60%. Is my home one of those?" and then read on.

Creating a sense of urgency is another important to-do when creating a headline. You can do this two ways...by appealing to an emotion like fear (as in the example above) or by creating a

timeframe. So, if you are offering a weight-loss product, you could say...

“Lose 30 lbs the easy way”

Or you could say...

“In just 6 weeks you could be 30 lbs lighter!”

The first works okay. It appeals to laziness and hits its target audience. But it makes it easy for the prospect to think, “That can wait.” The second one gives a picture of a new, slimmer you in just 6 weeks—the prospect can’t wait to get started.

Two final pieces of advice for getting the most from your headlines. First, read headlines. See what’s worked in the past and what’s working now. There’s nothing wrong with borrowing inspiration. How many ‘How to fill in the blank and fill in the blank’ headlines have you seen. They all borrow from Dale Carnegie’s ‘How to Win Friends and Influence People’ headline because it is a formula that works. And second. Test. Test a lot. Try different headlines on the exact same letter or brochure. If you’re using an ad, try it one week with one headline, the next with another. See which headline pulls in more prospects. And then test another headline against that one.

Headlines can make a huge difference in the response your advertising is getting. If you know what makes a good headline, you can be sure you are making the most of your advertising dollars.

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