

Making Headlines

Benefit headlines that get results for your advertisers

Most of us realize that the headline is one of the most important components of any print ad. The headline grabs the reader's attention and compels them to read the rest of the ad. A print ad is essentially a silent salesperson that attempts to convince the reader to purchase the goods or services offered by the advertiser. Just like any good salesperson the ad needs to open the "call" with the promise of a benefit. Opening with a benefit arouses the prospect's curiosity and leads them to believe that reading the remainder of the ad is in their own best interest. Getting a potential customer to read the entire ad significantly increases the likelihood that they will take action and make a purchase from your client.

Several years ago *Communications Briefings* conducted a series of scientific tests to determine what elements make an ad effective. Their survey found that ads fail because they fail to answer the reader's main question... "*What's in it for me?*"

To write stronger benefit headlines you can use the "HOW TO" technique:

1. Start your headline with the words "how to". Using this format forces you to include a benefit. Example: Instead of a headline stating **Disability Insurance**, use **How to protect your family!**
2. Support the headline with detailed body copy. "*If you are disabled, how will your family make ends meet? Our affordable disability insurance policies will protect your family's income and give you peace of mind*"
3. After you write the headline drop the words "How to". Using the example above: "**Protect your family!**" This makes the headline stronger and more direct.

Other points to keep in mind when creating a headline:

1. Be specific-tell the reader exactly what the benefit is.
2. Avoid excessive claims and exaggerations-using words like "Incredible" "Fantastic" etc. which may cause the reader to doubt the truthfulness of the entire ad. Only make claims that are factual and verifiable.

3. Make sure the headline and the body copy tell the same story. A headline followed up by strong body copy is the one-two punch of an effective ad. If these two elements do not work together, at best the reader will be confused, at worst they may think the advertiser is using a “bait & switch” technique.
4. Make sure the headline is big enough and bold enough to grab the reader’s attention.
5. Do not try to accomplish too much in a headline. Pick one strong benefit offered by the client and promote it. If the customer has several strengths suggest a series of ads. Each week you can include a listing of all of the customer’s services but put emphasis on one key point. Use a series of these ads to promote all aspects of the customer’s business.
6. Always consider the audience the advertiser is trying to reach. Ask the customer to describe his/her customer in detail and to explain what motivates customers to buy from them. This information can be used to develop new headlines and marketing programs for the advertiser.

By working with your customers to develop effective ads with strong benefit oriented headlines, you not only ensure their continued success but your own as well.