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Fundamentals of Headlines, Copy and Design in Communication

By Lee Hopkins

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While there are many opinions about what constitutes good headlines, copy and design, most professionals agree that these individual elements of the ad must work together. In combination, they must grab attention, convey a persuasive message and portray a consistent identity.

An ad that's too cluttered can't convey a message quickly enough to engage the reader or viewer. One that's out of character with the product or service will be confusing rather than convincing.

An effective headline (or a broadcast ad's opening moments) must immediately capture the audience's interest and pull them into the ad. A good rule of thumb is to look for the inherent "drama" in what you are offering, and capitalize on that to create an alluring ad.

Examples: "We're Losing Our Minds" -- a university ad appealing for funds. And "You Don't Have to be Jewish to Love Levy's" -- a bread company ad featuring a Chinese man biting into a whopping pastrami sandwich.

Next, the photo or illustration amplifies the message. An ad for Bull Worldwide Information Systems, for example, showed a satellite photo of the earth with the headline "GloBull."

Once the headline and illustration have drawn the customer into your ad, the copy convinces them to buy. So make it believable, full of information, and bolstered with words and style that complement your identity. Almost any Volkswagen or Mercedes Benz

print ad exemplifies convincing copy in a style that suits the product perfectly.

Broadcast advertising will also involve selecting music, sound effects, actors or announcers, and perhaps a theme song. All these elements enhance your message and reinforce your identity but, for the most part, the copy and what it conveys actually do the selling.

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Progressive Headlines Guide Customers To Buy

By Karon Thackston

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Headlines are, without a doubt, one of the most important elements in copywriting. As has been said countless times before, if you don't get your readers' attention with the headline, the chance of them reading your copy is virtually none. But headlines (and sub-headlines) play a vital part in the copywriting process for other reasons, too.

Whether we, as copywriters, like it or not, the fact is most people will not read all the copy word for word. Headlines can help fill in the blanks in several ways so "skimmers" still get the gist of the information included in the copy.

Headlines Outline the Benefits

Using headlines and sub-heads that state benefits about your product/service can be a powerful strategy. Using wireless home networking for example, you might create headlines and sub-heads that read:

- Work From Anywhere In Your Home
- No More Jumbled Cables Strung Everywhere
- Have Multiple Computers Online At The Same Time
- Make All The Computer Users In Your Home Happy

Even if the customer didn't read the copy included in between these heads and sub-heads, they would still be made aware of all the benefits of having a wireless home network.

Headlines Give An Overview

Depending on the type of copy you're writing, headlines can help to urge your customers to read further. In fact, in long-form copy, headlines should create their own sub-set of copy. If you read just the headlines, they should make sense all by themselves. For example, copy about a new book on how to start your own business might use the following headlines.

New Book Takes You Step-by-Step Through Starting Your Own Business

An introduction would go here as well as copy designed to gain the attention of the reader.

Starting A Business Is Easier Than Ever

Continue with the copy here.

The Little Known Secrets In This Book Will Show You How

More copy here.

See? As you read through the headlines and sub-headlines they make sense even without any copy. This serves to give an overview of the information to those customers who may not read every word of the copy you've written. If they read just the headlines and sub-heads, they'll still understand what you're offering.

Headlines Can Raise Curiosity

Make a statement that's so unusual it doesn't make sense. Create "cliff-hangers" with your headlines and only give so much information before stopping. When you use these and other interest builders, you can encourage customers to read further into your copy just to satisfy their curiosity. Using natural gardening products as our example, the headlines and sub-heads often look like this:

- My Roses Are Bursting With Blossoms Since I Stopped Watering Them
- My Prize-Winning Tulips Would Wither Up and Die If It Weren't for...
- Which Annual Blooms Twice As Big When You Give It A Beer/Shampoo Cocktail?

These statements make you think. They start the reader wondering so that he/she continues to read on to get the rest of the story.

When creating headlines in your copy, think about how they all work together. Instead of just plopping bolded words in between paragraphs, create a plan revolving around progressive headlines that can lead your readers to buy.

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