

Getting people to part with their money, the old-fashioned way.

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By Walter Burek

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Neither snow, nor rain, nor heat, nor the rising cost of postage can keep a well-written sales letter from persuading readers to send money directly to its writer or organization. And many of the techniques successful direct mail writers have been using for years work equally well on-line today. Here are ten tried-and-true tips from the snail-mailers.

1. Have a plan.

Writing a sales letter is a lot like writing an ad. And successful advertising starts with clear thinking about what to say -- and to whom. Picture your prospect in your mind -- in terms of age, income, attitudes, and the product she or he uses. Then determine the single most important benefit your product offers. The essence of a good plan is sacrifice -- playing down the lesser benefits to concentrate on the biggest.

2. Start fast.

The first sentence of your letter is the most important. That's when your prospect decides whether your letter is just an other piece of junk mail or something that will make him say, "This sounds interesting. I'd like to know more about it." Involve your reader in your first sentence, or your second sentence may never be read.

3. The early offer gets the worm.

Direct-mail pros work on the coupon first, not the letter. What's the offer? How should it be stated? What are the terms? The offer is what gets the action. So make it clear. Make it direct. And make it early. Because a good offer can outpull any other technique to get your letter started.

4. Show the benefits

Write about benefits, not features. A feature describes a product; a benefit explains what it does for the reader. Remember that people don't want to buy grass seed. They want to buy a beautiful green lawn.

5. Show some personality.

The tone of your letter should be as important as what you say. Write the way you speak, using the

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language of the reader, so he perceives the sales pitch is coming from a peer rather than an outsider. By using this approach, you receive empathy from the reader by saying, "Look, I'm just like you. I know your problem; I've been through it; I have a solution." Writing peer to peer -- writing as you would speak to a friend -- is the tone you want to cultivate in every letter you write.

6. Go long.

The amateur letter writer assumes that people will not read long letters. All the research tells us otherwise. The fact is that long letters sell better than short ones. If they make an attractive offer. If they get the reader's attention at the top. If they are packed with facts. You are asking your readers to make an investment -- of their time, money, or both. They need to be -- they want to be -- convinced that what you're selling is worth it. And that takes plenty of information. So the more you tell, the more you'll sell.

7. Be short.

Research also shows that people won't read long letters that look hard to read, with long, black, solid blocks of text. Better to use short paragraphs that make your letter look more inviting, and easy to get through.

Use simple words and use jargon sparingly. Write in crisp, short, snappy sentences. Even sentence fragments.

When you're writing a sales letter, you're trying to communicate with your readers, not impress them with your grasp of the American language. Remember, you're writing to sell, not impress.

8. Be free.

Give something away. A free trial, free shipping, even free literature you may have printed for another purpose. It has been proven, time and again, that adding something free adds tremendously to the power of the sales letter.

9. Don't let 'em get away.

Follow the advice in the previous eight tips and you'll find yourself writing letters that will capture the interest of your readers. But you can't just let them nod in agreement, and do nothing. After all, it's human nature for most people to procrastinate. You can't let them off the hook. The successful letter writer tackles inertia and creates a reason for the prospect to act -- and to act now. Ask her to tear off a reply card, check a preference, paste a sticker on the phone or calendar, or answer a short quiz. There are probably dozens of other simple devices you can think of. A reader who starts to do something with your mailing is a good bet to end up being a reader who buys something.

10. P.S. Don't forget a postscript.

A postscript is an opportunity to restate the offer, to create a sense of urgency with a deadline, to offer a special premium or to remind the reader of an important detail. And maybe the best reason for using a P.S. is that so many professionals have proven that it works.

Walter writes, edits and publishes "Words @ Work", a FREE bimonthly newsletter of advice and information about writing that works. Subscribe by visiting www.walterburek.com or via e-mail to:

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Walter Burek is an award-winning copywriter who learned his craft at some of the finest advertising agencies in the world, and has been a writer and Creative Director on some of advertising's most important accounts. Currently, he offers freelance copywriting services through his company, WalterBurek.com. Walter also writes, edits and publishes Words@Work, a newsletter for marketing communications professionals.

The Old Fashioned Books Vs. Free Audio Books

By Paton Jackson

In the last two decades a new concept has arisen – The concept of listening to a book instead of reading the book. The audio book technology is still developing but audio books are getting more and more popular. However, the old fashioned book is still the much more common than any other method. In this article we will elaborate on the differences between these two book methods:

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