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**Long Sales Letters vs. Short Sales Letters**

**By Matthew Cobb**

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Everywhere I turn, I'm being asked to weigh in on the issue of whether copy should be long or short in a sales letter. I receive countless newsletters on copywriting and marketing, and they are all still debating the issue.

I doubt that the question will be answered definitively, but after hearing from other Internet copywriters and after considering the issue myself, I've learned that if you follow three guidelines, the issue of length will become almost irrelevant.

**Guideline #1) TELL PROSPECTS WHAT THEY WANT AND NEED TO KNOW TO MAKE A BUYING DECISION.**

Interested prospects will read even a sales letter of several pages long if they are interested and if your sales letter has good content. Many of us are more interested in telling prospects what WE want them to know. But we should all be telling prospects what THEY want and need to know.

**Guideline #2) OMIT NEEDLESS WORDS.**

This guideline is actually Rule #17 from Strunk & White's famous little book on writing, The Elements of Style. (If you write, you really should read this small but influential book.)

Anything that doesn't have a direct purpose or work toward winning over your prospect should be cut out. I don't care how much you want to tell them about what a great reputation your company has and how successful you were last year. Unless that information takes the reader one step closer to buying (admittedly, sometimes it does), cut it.

Do the research and know your target audience. Then, write with their needs in mind. Write everything your prospects want and need to read, but write **ONLY** what they want and need to read. Cut the rest.

Guideline #3) TEST. TEST. TEST.

This is the best indicator of how long your sales letter should be. If you don't like to test, you have to rely on luck. Not a good idea. Put together the best sales letter you can with everything a prospect needs to know to make a buying decision, cut out anything that's not essential reading for your prospect, then run it. Record the results. Rewrite a portion of the letter. Test again. Record the results. Keep doing this until conversion rates improve and you'll know how long your sales letter needs to be. Of course, this kind of testing is much easier online than in offline direct mail, but it needs to be done. (Offline direct mail will probably require a split mailing.)

Although many people will tell you that "research has shown longer sales letters pull better," the only research you should be paying attention to is your own. Long sales letters don't pull well for everyone.

There's an easy way to answer to the question of how long or short a sales letter should be. (It's the same for other similar questions of tone, diction, and how much text you should emphasize.) Determine the needs and desires of your readers and you'll have your answer.

Matthew Cobb is an independent copywriter/consultant. Contact him at [contact@cobbwriting.com](mailto:contact@cobbwriting.com) or learn more about Sales Letters by Matthew Cobb by visiting his Web site at

, and sign up for his free monthly e-publication, The Seductive Sales

Letter Clinic.

### **SALES LETTERS FOR SUCCESS**

**By Meredith Pond**

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Sales letters are one of the most popular forms of advertising today, and have been for some time. The reason for this is simple: they work. However, with no pure form and no specific requirements for format, length, etc., writing a truly effective sales letter can be a daunting task for even the most seasoned marketing professional.

To come up with a sales letter that sizzles without turning your prospects off, there are a few general rules you'd be wise to follow.

First, let's talk about length. In my line of work, I see a lot of sales letters. Most of these are one to three pages long, which is generally appropriate for a sales letter. Just the

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other day, however, I got a call from a man who wanted to know how much I would charge him to edit his sales letter, complaining that he just wasn't getting the results he wanted. When I asked him how long the letter was, he replied, "it's about twelve pages." Twelve pages!! Would you want to be pitched to for twelve whole pages? Yuck!

When you sit down to write your sales letter, ask yourself how much patience you have when reading something of this nature. Would you get bored, even angry, if someone expected you to keep reading their sales letter for five pages? Three pages? When writing your letter, be mindful of your target audience and their schedules. If your prospects are unlikely to have more than five or ten minutes to devote to your sales pitch, try stick to one page.

Now let's talk hype. Most of the sales letters I've come across are full of hype, because that's what the customer wants. Hype can be effective or ineffective, depending on your business and the kind of people you're trying to sell to. If you're selling an MLM business opportunity, hype can work well. On the other hand, if your intended audience consists of savvy, experienced business people, you'll probably do better with a brief introduction followed by an explanation of what your product or service can do for their business.

In either case, be careful about using too much bold type or

screaming your message at customers. Putting important points in bold type or caps can be an effective marketing tool, but only when used in moderation. Exclamation points can also be helpful, but use them sparingly. When reading back through your letter, pay attention to the tone. If you feel you're being yelled at, tone it down a bit.

A well-written, well-targeted sales letter can do wonders for sagging sales. For tips on writing effective sales letters, see <http://www.drnunley.com/copywriting.htm>.

Meredith Pond is editor and manager of DrNunley's <http://CheapWriting.com>. See her low-cost writing and editing services for students and business people, including a web site rewriting package. Reach Meredith at [meredith@drnunley.com](mailto:meredith@drnunley.com) or 801-328-9006.

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