



## **SALES LETTERS**

### **WHAT IS A SALES LETTER?**

A sales letter is a document designed to generate sales. It persuades the reader to place an order; to request additional information; or to lend support to the product or service or cause being offered. It influences the reader to take a specific action by making an offer - not an announcement - to them. To sell the sales letter must be specific, go to the right audience, appeal to the readers needs, and it must be informative.

### **PART OF THE SELLING PACKAGE**

The job of the sales letter is to sell, not to tell. The letter alone does not always do the entire selling (persuading) job. Other pieces of support literature that amplify the selling points, illustrate the product or service, or provide technical information, may be needed. Supplement the letter with a brochure or product sheet if necessary, and if you do, mention it in the body of the letter.

### **RESEARCH**

Preparing your sales letter means you need to understand the product or service being offered, the market, and the readers needs. There is no substitute for product or service knowledge. Any source of information should be considered. On-line resources, ads, brochures, articles, books, reports, newsletters and newspapers, and in-person interviews, are good sources.

### **THE PRODUCT OR SERVICE, THE MARKET AND THE READER**

What does the product or service do for the one who needs it? What can the reader gain from buying it? What is unique selling point of the product or service? To answer these questions begin by distinguishing the benefits from the features: Persuade your reader to buy based on the grounds of what the product or service does for him or her (benefit), not what the product or service is (feature)!

A benefit is what the product or service does, and what the buyer gains from the feature. A benefit is the specific outcome of the feature. A feature is something the product or service already has. Benefits are what motivate people to buy. A car, for example, has four tyres (feature). If those tyres are proven to reduce accidents by hugging wet roads, then we have the benefit of those tyres. Stress that the reader is less likely to have an accident, if he buys the tyres.

How do you plan to market the product or service? Through the Internet, direct mail, Email, direct sales, print advertising, etc.? Do you need other advertising or literature to support the sales letter? Who is your competition? How are they marketing this product or service? What is your advertising budget? Are your marketing hopes realistic?

Who is your prospective buyer? What motivates a person to buy this item? The experts say that the emotion most often used to manipulate people to buy is fear, and the thousand variations of it.

Walk a mile in the buyers' shoes. Does your offer appeal to the readers hot buttons, AKA emotional needs? Can you transform him from prospect to buyer?



## ELEMENTS OF A SALES LETTER, SIMILAR TO MOST ADS

Keep these basic components in mind:

The image, if used, is near the headline. It helps to catch the reader's eye. The headline is usually 3 - 30 words long. It grabs the reader's attention, and tells him what the ad (sales letter) is about. It makes a promise regarding what the item you are selling will do for him. The sub-headline or lead paragraph is optional. Sometimes it's used to expand the headline. (More on the sub-heading later.)

The body: it expands the theme, fills in details, offers proof, and shows how you plan to fulfil the promise you made in the headline. The closing, or call to action, urges the reader to take the next step you want him to take.

### ON THE IMAGE

If you have a logo or design for your business do not use it in the sales letter unless it is truly relevant to what you are offering. You are not selling your business name, or logo, you are selling benefits that the buyer will realise if he buys your product or service. Use a specific image that is germane to your headline, lead, and theme, or do not use one at all. Stay with words.

### ON FORMATTING THE SALES LETTER

Use your business or a personal heading or nameplate, minus the logo. The next component is the headline. Type the headline in a few short lines where the inside name and address would go. Or, you could consider centring the headline or putting it in a text box to grab attention. You may want to add colour or shading to the box for more attractiveness.

You can follow the headline with an inside name and address block of the reader, and a greeting. Another way to do this is to use a form letter without an inside name and address block using a general greeting that represents the readers' interests. "Dear Tyre Purchaser," would be valid if you were selling tyres. (One inch margins all the way around are fine.)

The important thing is the sequence, not nameplates and inside address block. Again it goes like this:

- Your business or personal nameplate,
- image and headline,
- inside address block, if you use one,
- greeting,
- lead paragraph,
- body,
- closing.



### **JOB OF THE HEADLINE:**

Ideally, the job of the headline is to:

- get the readers attention,
- target the audience,
- list a benefit,
- make a promise.

This draws the reader into the rest of the copy. Headlines of 10 words or more tend to generate more orders or leads. Headlines that promise a benefit also tend to sell more.

Lead with one of the unique selling points.

Always shoot your big gun first: use your main selling point in the headline. Remember you only get 7 - 10 seconds to hook the reader. If the biggest benefit of what you are selling is cost, then list that first.

Remember: The headline has a benefit and makes a promise. The promise should be unique to what you are selling, and one that your competitors are currently not talking about. Use "power words" in the headline. Try: "You." "Free." "Proven." "Imagine." "How To." "Fast." "Cheap." "Enjoy." "Now." "Learn." "Introducing," and so forth. In the body of the sales letter you will begin to offer proof.

### **SUGGESTIONS ON HOW TO START**

There are many possibilities for opening your sales letter that could persuade the reader to buy. Here are some that have been used. Experiment, and create one that is right for your offer. If you have trouble identifying your product or service's unique selling point, or beginning your letter, consult a competent copywriter.

Tell a story that the reader can identify with, in conversational tone. Make an announcement of a new product or service, a one of a kind event, or important news, showcasing your unique selling point. Address the reader as your equal: "Dear fellow tyre purchaser . . . "

You could go with something provocative, perhaps a quote. You could open by identifying the reader's problem, one that your product will solve. Ask a question; Let the reader in on some secret or little known information

### **SUB-HEADLINE OR LEAD PARAGRAPH**

This part of the sales letter is optional. It can be used to expand the promise made in the headline or used to deliver a 2nd major benefit of the product or service. A sub-headline can also be used as the second part; to answer a question posed in the headline. For example, Part 1 could say: "Want to double your part-time income during the next 90 day period?" Part 2 could say: "Well, here's how to . . . "

### **BODY OF THE LETTER**

Here, using the same tone and staying with the spirit of the headline, you begin to give details of your unique selling point. You continue talking about the benefits and offer proof of the claim you made early on. You share the details of the benefits. You prove your case or claim. Remember, by the end of the body, the goal is to create an emotional response that will cause the reader to do what you are now going to tell him to do.

### **CLOSING OR CALL TO ACTION**

If you ask the reader to order, support, or to contact you for the specified reason you must make it easy for him to reply. Support the sales letter with a post card or prepaid envelope, and an order form. If not appropriate, supply a toll free telephone number, an email link, and or your URL. Always close with a thank you and use a signature at the end of the letter. Save one of the best points for last: Always use a PostScript. For example, "If you order before March 1, we will include a free . . . " Or "Money back guaranteed . . . " Or "Discount is good until . . . "



### **A FINAL SUGGESTION**

Remember: Getting the reader to show you his money is the challenge .... Period! The best way to tell if you are close to accomplishing this challenge is to use test readers. When composing a successful sales letter there is no substitute for test readers. When you give your letter to a test reader ask him or her what is missing, how you could improve the offer, and if they would buy.