As part of this regular feature, Andy Owen this month looks at HEADLINES...

The master, John Caples once said

"What good is all the painstaking work on copy if the headline isn't right? If the headline doesn't stop people, the copy might as well be written in Greek."

How true that is…

If the headline of a letter or ad is poor, the best copywriter in the world can't write copy that will save it. They haven't got a chance. Because, if the headline is poor, no one will even venture into the copy. It will not be read.

And copy that is not read will not sell. End of story…

On average, five times as many people will read the headline of your ad and letter, than read the body copy.

Therefore it is absolutely essential that the winning idea, the proposition, must be in the headline, not in the copy. If it's not, there will be no selling proposition to 90% of your audience.

So, if you have news to tell, don't bury it in your body copy, which nine out of ten people won't read. State it loud and clear in your headline.

…just think about that for a minute, next time you consider your next headline…

One of my all time favourite headlines was written by Jerry de la Femina:
"If you've got a dollar, and you've got piles, send me your dollar and we'll get rid of your piles. Or, you can keep your dollar and keep your piles".

Headlines, which work best, are those that promise a benefit. Also, those that contain news. The very best contain news of benefits...

Finally, try if possible, to use the brand name in your headline. Not always possible, but recommended if you can. Because, if you don't, nine out of ten people will never know what product you are promoting.

Here's some examples of headlines that made loads of money and others that just wasted oodles of it, because the writer was a buffoon...

**Hewlett Packard**

**HEWLETT PACKARD**

18310 Ponderosa Avenue - Cupertino, California 95014 - Telephone (408) 996-0100

---

**Now you can have your own personal "computer"!**

**Introducing: The HP-65**

---

the first and only fully-programmable pocket calculator that you can use to solve extremely complex, lengthy or repetitive problems in seconds -- anywhere... anytime!

---

Imagine a "computer" that fits in your pocket! Imagine that it's no bigger than -- and looks very much like -- an ordinary pocket calculator ... but doesn't cost very much more! Now imagine this miniature marvel in your hands, as you try it out for 15 days and cut your problem-solving time down to seconds!

But why imagine? Now -- thanks to Hewlett-Packard's newest state-of-the-art technology -- there is a pocket-sized "computer" ... the HP-65!

Just like a computer, it's fully programmable.

And it uses computer logic to solve even extremely complex, lengthy or repetitive problems in seconds -- anywhere, anytime -- at the touch of a few keys!

No, this personal "computer" doesn't use tiny little reels of tape or miniature keypunch cards. It uses small (approximately 1/4" x 3") magnetic cards. Each card can store a program -- a sequence of keystrokes -- up to 100 steps long.

(And, if additional steps are needed to handle an unusually long program, you can do it in stages.)

To insert a program into the HP-65, just run a pre-recorded program card through it. All it takes is two seconds! The information from the card is duplicated in the HP-65's program memory, where it remains for as long as you leave your personal "computer" turned on.

To solve a problem, just feed in the known data by pressing a few keys on the HP-65's own keyboard. No other equipment is needed. Then start the program (over, please)

Stan Holden of Stone & Adler wrote this letter nearly 30 years ago. They were HP's direct response agency at that time. It was a four-page letter incidentally and it was so successful that it created a 5 month backlog of orders for the product.

Headline was very newesy and crammed with benefits...
Recognised as a classic now, this was one of the first 'woman to woman' letters, written by Sheila Stogol for Bankers Life. The headline contains news of benefits in an intriguing way and preselects its audience very effectively.

**Bankers Life**

**Hall Green Greyhound Stadium**

One of mine this one, which recently won a Copywriting award from The Royal Mail. Pulled a staggering response rate of 51%. Hits them right between the eyes and makes them act. And they did…
Clever, tricky, lazy headlines - double meanings, puns and other intellectual offerings tend to be counter productive. We all see rubbish like this every day.

NPI
Can you believe stuff like this? A headline that says nothing and the letter is just woeful. No one is interested in your new name, unless it offers a benefit to them. Don't let the Financial Director write your letters anymore. It will cost your company a lot of money.

Halifax

An extremely limp headline. Completely flaccid. Where is the benefit? If there are extras, say what they are. Specifics sell, generalities do not. And that bar code a joke surely? Just like the mailing.

Dixons Group
These people produce appalling mailings. I have a file full of them. They haven't got a clue. What this headline is supposed to achieve is totally beyond me. No one is interested in how many products they have…only what those products can do for them…

So, there we are. Some examples of the best and worst use of headlines.

Remember, the best headlines are really just selling ideas expressed in the simplest possible words. No frills. No adjectives. No attempts at cleverness.

As Caples said, decades ago.

"The best headlines appeal to basic human desires such as the desire for self-improvement, for good value, for peace of mind, and for security in old age. These appeals have worked successfully for years, and can be expected to work successfully in the future"

Nothing much has changed, has it? It won't either…

Keep the faith…

See you next month.

If anyone would like complete copies of any letters reviewed here, please contact Andy direct at andyowen@aol.com or copydeskUK@aol.com

About the Author

Andy Owen is Managing Director of Andy Owen & Associates, a leading International Strategic Marketing Consultancy specialising in all aspects of contemporary direct marketing. The company has offices in UK, Middle East & North Africa, with Associate Offices in Europe & The USA.

The company's corporate website is www.andyowen.co.uk The specialist copy division has its own site at www.copywritingthatsells.com

As well as his International speaking engagements, Andy runs in-house copywriting and direct marketing sessions and workshops for companies and organisations all over the world. If you feel your company could benefit from one of these, please contact Andy for details.

If you would like further information on any aspect of copywriting for direct marketing, please contact Andy direct at andyowen@aol.com or copydeskUK@aol.com
Don’t forget to check out Andy’s superb new DVD on Copywriting called “How To Write Copy That Really Sells.” To find out more and see excerpts from the DVD, visit http://www.andyowen.co.uk/buy-online.html