

Sales Letter Success

12 step plan to sales letter success



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You don't have to be an award-winning copywriter to create effective sales letters. In fact, writing great sales letters is more of a science than an art. Even the pros use proven "templates" to create sales letters that get results. The following is a 12-step template for writing foolproof

sales letters.

Overcoming the Hurdles Leading to Buying Resistance

Every person has some form of buying resistance. The objective of your sales letter should be to overcome your reader's buying resistance while persuading them to take action. I liken writing a sales letter to running a steeplechase foot race. The first one to the finish line who has jumped over all the hurdles is the winner, or in this case, gets the sale.

Whether you're giving a sales presentation in person or on paper, the process of overcoming the hurdles leading to buying resistance are much the same. These hurdles are manifested in many spoken and unspoken customer comments such as:

“You don't understand my problem”

“How do I know you're qualified?”

“I don't believe you”

“I don't need it right now”

“It won't work for me”

“What happens if I don't like it?”

“I can't afford it”

Results-oriented sales letters will need to address some or all of these objections to be effective. The 12-step sales letter template is designed to overcome each of these objections in a careful, methodical series of copywriting tactics. The 12 steps are:

Get attention

Identify the problem

Provide the solution

Present your credentials

Show the benefits

Give social proof

Make your offer

Inject scarcity

Give a guarantee

Call to action

Give a warning

Close with a reminder

Each of these 12 steps add to reader's emotions while calming their fears.

Motivation Is An Emotional Thing

It's important to remember that people are motivated to buy based on their emotions and justify their purchase based on logic only after the sale. This means that each step in the sales letter process must build on the reader's emotions to a point where they are motivated to take action.

That being true - - there are only two things that truly motivate people and they are the promise of gain or the fear of loss. Of the two, the fear of loss is the stronger motivator.

Think about it.

Would you rather buy a \$50 course on "How to Improve Your Marriage" or "How to Stop Your Divorce or Lover's Rejection?" I have empirical data that proves that the second title outsells the first 5 to 1. Why? Because it addresses the fear of loss.

Underlying the promise of gain and the fear of loss are seven "universal motivations" to which everyone responds. Whatever product or service you are selling you need to position it so that its benefits provide one or more of these universal motivations.

To be wealthy

To be good looking

To be healthy

To be popular

To have security

To achieve inner peace

To have free time

To have fun

Ultimate motivations are what people “really” want. The product or service is just a vehicle to providing these benefits so make sure your sales letter focuses on these motivational factors.

The 12-Step Sales Letter System

Now that we know what impedes a person to buy and what motivates a person to action let’s review the 12 elements of a winning sales letter.

1. Get Attention

Assuming the reader has opened your envelope, the next step is to get their attention. The opening headline is the first thing that your reader will look at. If it doesn’t catch their attention you can kiss your letter goodbye. People have a very short attention span and usually sort their mail over the wastebasket. If the headline doesn’t call out to them and pique their interest, they will just stop and throw your letter away.

The following are three headline generating templates that are proven to get attention.

“HOW TO _____”

People love to know how to do things. When combined with a powerful benefit the “How to” headline always gets people’s attention. In fact, they’re probably the two most powerful words you can use in a headline.

“SECRETS OF _____ REVEALED!”

People always want to know “insider secrets.” We love to know things that other

people aren't privy to. Knowledge is power and those who have it feel powerful. Besides that, most of us enjoy a good mystery, especially in the end when the "secret" is revealed.

WARNING: DON'T EVEN THINK OF _____ UNTIL YOU _____.

Remember that people are motivated by fear of loss more than the promise of gain? Well, the "warning" headline screams fear. The word "warning" demands attention and combined with something of interest to the reader, is a very powerful headline.

2. Identify the Problem

Now that you have your reader's attention you need to gain their interest by spelling out their problem and how it feels to have that problem. The reader should say to himself, "Yeah, that's exactly how I feel" when they read your copy. In fact, you shouldn't stop there. Pretend that it's an open wound that you're rubbing salt into.

This technique is called, "problem – agitate." You present the problem then agitate it so that they really feel the pain and agony of their situation. People are such strong creatures of habit that we rarely change our ways unless we feel great amounts of pain. In fact, companies are no different. Most businesses trudge along doing the same old thing until things get so bad that they have to make a change.

For example, if you were selling garage door openers you might agitate the problem by telling a short story about what happens when it doesn't work.

"There's nothing worse than getting home in the evening and not having your garage door open. It's dark outside and after tripping on the porch step you search for your front door key.

Finally, you find it only to scratch your new front door up trying to find the keyhole. Exhausted, you get inside and plop down on the couch just when you remember your car is still running in your driveway...."

In this scenario the problem was a faulty garage door opener and the

agitation is all the terrible things that happen because of the faulty garage door opener.

3. Provide the Solution

Now that you've built your readers interest by making them feel the pain it's time to provide the solution. This is the part of the sales letter where you boldly stake your claim that you can solve the reader's problem.

In this section you will introduce yourself, your product and/or your service. Relieve the reader's mind by telling them that they there's no need to struggle through all their problems because your product or service will solve it for them.

4. Present your Credentials

In most cases, after you have introduced yourself and your product or service your reader is thinking, "Yeah, sure he can fix my problem. That's what they all say." So now it's important to hit them right away with the reason why you can be trusted.

List your credentials including any one of the following:

Successful case studies.

Prestigious companies (or people) you have done business with.

The length of time you've been in your field of expertise

Conferences where you have spoken

Important awards or recognitions

Your reader should get the impression after reading this section that "you've been there and done that" with great success and that the reader can expect the same results.

5. Show the Benefits

Now it's time to tell the reader how they will personally benefit from your product or service. Don't make the common mistake of telling all about the features of your product without talking about the benefits. As I already stated, people are interested, not so much in you, or even your product or service, but what it will do for them.

Get a piece of paper and draw a line down the center of the paper. Now write all the features of your product or service on the left. Think about the obvious benefits and not-so-obvious benefits of the each feature and write them down on the right side of the paper. Most of the time your product will have hidden benefits that people won't naturally think of.

For example, a hot tub not only soothes and relaxes your muscles but it also gives you an opportunity to talk to your spouse without interruptions. The hidden benefit is greater communication with your spouse and ultimately a better marriage!

Bullet point each benefit to make it easier to read. Think about every possible benefit your reader may derive from your product or service. In many cases, people will buy a product or service based on only one of the benefits you list.

6. Give Social Proof

After you've presented all your benefits the reader will again begin to doubt you, even though they secretly want all your claimed benefits to be true. To build your credibility and believability present your reader with testimonials from satisfied customers.

Testimonials are powerful selling tools that prove your claims to be true. To make your testimonial even more powerful include pictures of your customers with their names and addresses (at least the city and state).

You might even ask if you can use their phone number. Most readers won't call but it is a powerful statement to include their complete

contact information. It demonstrates that you are real and so are the testimonials.

7. Make Your Offer

Your offer is the most important part of your sales letter. A great offer can overcome mediocre copy but great copy cannot overcome a mediocre offer. Your offer should be irresistible. You want your reader to say to themselves, “I’d be stupid not to take advantage of this deal.”

Your offer can come in many different formats. The best offers are usually an attractive combination of price, terms, and free gifts. For example, if you were selling a car your offer might be a discounted retail price, low interest rate, and a free year of gas.

Hint: When developing your offer you should always try to raise the value of your offer by adding on products or services rather than lowering your price. Include vivid explanations of the benefits of the additional products or services you are offering in order to raise the perceived value of your offer.

8. Give a Guarantee

To make your offer even more irresistible you need to take all the risk out of the purchase. Remember, that people have a built-in fear that they are going to get ripped off. How many times have you purchased a product and got stuck with it because the merchant wouldn’t give your money back?

Give the absolute strongest guarantee you are able to give. If you aren’t confident enough in your product or service to give a strong guarantee you should think twice about offering it to the public.

In reality, almost all small businesses already have a very strong guarantee, but don’t realize it! If you had an irate customer that wanted their money back would you just say, “No, I’m sorry. I will not

give your money back?” Probably not. If they insist on getting their money back, in most cases you’ll give it back to them.

You see, most businesses already have a strong guarantee and don’t hold it up and trumpet it for fear that a lot of people would take them up on it. That’s simply doesn’t happen. When was the last time you asked for a full refund on something? If you’re like me, it’s been a while.

Here is an example of a guarantee that I give for one of my products:

"100%, No Questions Asked, Take-It-To-The-Bank Guarantee"

I personally guarantee if you make a diligent effort to use just a few of the techniques in this course, you'll produce at least \$4,490 profit in the next 12 months. That's right, \$4,490 extra profit you never would have seen without this course. If you don't, I'll refund the entire cost of the course to you.

Actually, you get double protection. Here's how. At any time during the 12 months, if you sincerely feel I fell short in any way on delivering everything I promised, I'll be happy to give you a complete refund. Even if it's on the last day of the twelfth month!

This guarantee extends for an entire year and that they will receive specific benefits (in this case it’s money). If they don’t get what they expect, they get their money back with no questions asked. This virtually eliminates all the risk for the buyer.

Hint: Your offer may be so good that people won’t believe it. You’ve heard the old axiom, “If it’s too good to be true, it probably is.” To avoid this thinking, give the reason why you can give such a great offer. For example, you might have goofed when ordering inventory and now you’re overstocked and that’s why you can offer such a great price. When people read the reason why, it will help them reconcile your irresistible offer in their mind and make it more believable.

9. Inject Scarcity

Most people take their time responding to offers, even when they are irresistible. There are many reasons why people procrastinate on investing in a solution. The following are just a few:

- **They don't feel enough pain to make a change**
- **They are too busy and just forget**
- **They don't feel that the perceived value outweighs your asking price**
- **They are just plain lazy**

To motivate people to take action they usually need an extra incentive. Remember when I said that people are more motivated to act by the fear of loss rather than gain? That's exactly what you are doing when you inject scarcity into your letter.

When people think there is a scarce supply of something they need they usually rush to

get some of it. You can create a feeling of scarcity by telling your reader that either the quantity is in limited supply or that your offer is valid for only a limited time period.

Your offer could sound something like this:

“If you purchase by (future date) you will get the entire set of free bonuses”

Or

“Our supply is limited to only 50 (product or service) and will be sent to you on a ‘first come, first served’ basis. After they are gone there won't be any more available.”

Or

“This offer is only good until (future date) after which the (product or service) will return to its original price.”

One word of caution: If you make an offer you need to live up to it. If you go back on your word after the deadline date you will begin to erode the trust and confidence your customers have come to expect

from you.

10. Call to action

Do not assume that your reader knows what to do to receive the benefits from your offer. You must spell out how to make the order in a very clear and concise language. Whether its picking up the phone and making the call, filling out an order form, faxing the order form to your office etc.... you must tell them exactly how to order from you.

Your call to action must be “action-oriented.” You can do this using words like ‘Pick Up the Phone and Call Now!’ or “Tear Off the Order Form and Send It In Today!” or “Come to Our Store by Friday and ...” Be explicit and succinct in your instructions.

Plant your call to action throughout your letter. If you are asking the reader to call your free information line then perhaps some of the testimonials might say, “When I called their free information line” or in your offer you might say, “When you call our free information line...” Then when you give the call to action at the end of the letter, people won’t be surprised or confused. It will be consistent with what you said all throughout your letter.

11. Give a Warning

A good sales letter will continue to build emotion, right up to the very end. In fact, your letter should continue to build emotion even after your call to action. Using the “risk of loss” strategy, tell the reader what would happen if they didn’t take advantage of your offer. Perhaps they would continue to:

- **Struggle day to day to make ends meet**
- **Work too hard just to get a few customers**
- **Lose the opportunity to receive all your valuable bonuses**

- **Keep getting what they've always got**
- **Watch other companies get all the business**
- **Etc.**

Try to paint a graphic picture in the mind of the reader about the consequences of not taking action now. Remind them just how terrible their current state is and that it just doesn't have to be that way.

12. Close with a Reminder

Always include a postscript (P.S.). Believe it or not, your P.S. is the third most read element of your sales letter. I've seen good copywriters use not just one postscript, but many (P.P.S). In your postscript you want to remind them of your irresistible offer. If you've used scarcity in your sales letter, include your call to action then remind them of the limited time (or quantity) offer. It sounds like a simple step but postscripts get noticed.

Voila! You now have a powerful sales letter. Using this 12-step formula anyone can write an effective sales letter that sells. The following are a few extra tips to help you write an even better sales letter:

Tip #1: Write the Features/Benefits – The biggest hurdle to writing a great sales letter is just getting started. Many people have a fear of writing. One way to get your letter started and develop a helpful guide for your letter is to write a feature/benefit list.

Take a set of 3 x 5 cards and write all the features you know about on one side of the cards. Then turn the cards over and write a benefit for each feature. You'll have started your letter and produced a list of benefits you can use to write it.

Tip #2: Once you have completed the letter, let it sit for a day or so. This will allow you to be more objective you when you edit your letter. If you've just spent the last few hours working on it you will find it hard to catch the mistakes or edits in the letter because you're just too close to it.

Tip #3: Develop a “swipe file” to help get your creative juices flowing. When you see a great ad or receive a particularly effective letter in the mail, keep it in a file that you can refer back to again and again. Companies pay thousands of dollars to develop their marketing materials; you might as well take advantage of that by using it as a model for your own work.

Tip #4: Before you start writing your sales letter, develop a customer profile sheet by documenting every thing you know about your target customer. Some great copywriters put a picture of a typical customer in front of them as they write to help them remember to whom they are writing the letter.

Tip #5: I often get the question, “How long should my sales letter be?” and my answer is, “As long as it needs to be.” Each part of your sales letter should be building your case. If it takes ½ page to build your case then that’s how long your letter should be; however, I use a 24-page sales letter to successfully sell one of my products.

Most anyone can write a powerful sales letter by just following this simple 12-step process. Make sure that you include each of the steps because each step builds your case in a unique way and adds to the reader’s emotions.