

Salesmanship-in-Print

How to build your business with the perfect sales letter - Part 2

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In Part 1 of this three-part series, I introduced you to the concept of a sales or marketing letter as “salesmanship-in-print”, and we looked at the many ways in which anyone, in any business, can leverage the power of a marketing letter to expand and achieve their business goals.

Now, in Part 2, we’ll go into greater detail by taking a look at 11 key components you can incorporate into your own sales letter.

Writing it: the elements of an effective letter

To better help you craft your own successful marketing letter, let’s review several components that make up an effective marketing letter, whether you are inviting customers back to buy again or seeking new customers. Make certain most or all of these elements are in *your* letter. As you work with each of these elements and test different elements against each other, you will perfect your marketing letter and get the results you need for success.

1) **Opening or Headline.** Example: “101 ways to get your book published.” This is the “attention” part of the A.I.D.A. formula. Your purpose is to stop readers in their tracks. The headline is the equivalent of the first 11 words when a sales person is speaking to a prospect in person.

2) **Salutation.** Example: “Dear Rob” or “Dear Ms. Jones”. If you have a contact’s name, you should always address the letter accordingly. If you do *not* have the contact’s name, you must be careful and should substitute something that is general in nature yet will build rapport and a connection with your target audience. Writing “Dear Pizza Lover” is better than “Dear Sir or Madam”. If writing to an existing or previous customer, instead of “Dear Valued Customer” you could connect with the

customer's previous purchases, like "Dear Driving Enthusiast" or "Dear Airline Traveler". Think about your target audience.

3) **Transition.** This is your introduction that takes the reader from the headline into the body copy. It allows you to connect the headline with the rest of the letter. Without a logical transition you lose your reader.

4) **Uniqueness or Positioning.** This is where you will incorporate your USP (unique selling proposition). It's your commercial for what is unique about your business or products. No matter what happens with this letter, you have the opportunity to state your uniqueness or positioning in the marketplace. A lot of people forget about the USP when writing a sales letter. It's this portion of the letter where you need to take the time to set yourself apart.

Your headline grabbed their attention and your transition drew them in. You have properly introduced yourself and positioned yourself against your competitors. Now it's time to get them *excited* about what you're offering.

5) **Your presentation/the copy.** This is where you get into the Interest and Desire part of the A.I.D.A. model. Your "presentation" should indicate the most powerful claims and benefits of your offer. It is intended to keep the interest building in the reader. You are setting the stage for your offer and for closing the sale. The presentation copy is essentially a bonding process and qualifying method by which you work with the prospect throughout the procedure of ordering your product. And it is a more detailed explanation of your headline.

6) **Your offer.** Let's be clear – you're selling something. It might be your actual product or a service your business offers, or it might be something else. You might be "selling" an appointment for the client to visit your business or a chance to talk with that client. The offer is where you make it absolutely clear that you're selling *something*. It has to be clear and precise. Don't use

approximation... generalities create suspicion, while specifics *sell*. If your prospect is going to save \$1,075.32, say so; don't say "save over \$1,000".

7) **Justification.** You need to address the reader's cynicism, and talk about WHY you're making this offer. The readers of your letter are inundated with offers every day, so if you don't give them a good reason to believe in the validity of YOUR offer, then it looks like a gimmick. Your reader is probably thinking: "If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is" and "There's no such thing as a free lunch".

Let me share with you an example from a marketing letter I have used in my own business. The offer was for a free marketing plan, and the justification went like this: "Why am I offering this to you? It's just good business. Two out of three companies who receive our marketing plan choose to do business with us at some point in the future. It takes a lot of traditional advertising to find that many good clients." This justification was honest, sincere and made sense to the reader. As long as you give a valid, logical reason for making your offer, you can diffuse the other reasons your reader might have for why this offer is not worth his time or why there's not as much in it for him as for you. The justification helps break the negative conversation that's going on inside the head of your prospect.

8) **Bonus.** The "bonus" typically comes before the Call to Action in the letter. It's for the person who is sitting on the fence, unable to make a decision. It's your "extra reason" for him to act on your offer. If he's still reading at this point, he's actually interested in your offer, so it's time to close the sale. Bribe the reader – give him a bonus. The bonus doesn't have to be directly related to your offer or product/service, it just has to be something your reader would like to have or experience. How about a 2-for-1 offer, or free oil change, free engraving, free shipping, or donation to charity made in your reader's name? People will often act on an offer just *because* they like the bonus.

Case in point: my wife and I were recently in the market to buy a new bed. We went to one store that offered a free TV and DVD player with the purchase of the mattress set. Essentially, they were

trying to bribe me to stay in their store, and not go across the street to the competition. And it worked!

9) **Call to action.** Failure to use the call to action is one of the most commonly made marketing mistakes, both in sales letters *and* with actual salespeople. What is the call to action? It is a simple statement that tells the prospect clearly what you want him or her to do. It is where we're literally asking for the "order". Never assume your reader will *know* what he or she has to do in order to accept your offer. Be clear, succinct and blunt:

- "Pick up the phone. Call us now toll-free at xxx-xxx-xxxx."
- "Tear out the form below, fill it in and fax it to me at..."
- "Visit our web site at and click on the Buy Now icon."
- "Call and ask for Mary. Tell Mary you received this letter and you want to take advantage of the offer. Mary will... [explain the steps, take your order, etc.]"

There's often an anxiety for people to take action. If they don't know what they're supposed to do, they'll do nothing. People don't want to have to THINK. Help them break the ice. Give them the easy step-by-step instructions so they can take advantage of your offer.

10) **Sense of urgency.** By nature, we're all procrastinators. When do most people file their taxes or do their Christmas shopping? At the last minute! In this part of the letter, we're addressing the objection of "Let me think about it". Any professional salesperson knows that the "let me think about it" response is the kiss of death; good intentions won't make the sale and pay the bills. Give your reader a valid, overwhelming and compelling reason to act NOW.

As a general rule, people will take action and try something new for one of two reasons: to seek pleasure, or to avoid pain. Your bonus is the "pleasure", and the urgency is the "pain" – the pain of losing out on the offer if they wait too long to act. "Think this sounds too good to be true? It is. This offer won't last forever; it will expire on _____. So call right away to take advantage and get your

free _____." "There are only 15 available. Call today to take advantage of this offer".

11) Postscript (P.S.). At the end of the letter, you should always provide a postscript. Think of the postscript as an "executive summary" of the letter. Most people are "skimmers" – they don't want to waste time and will skim any mailing or article looking for clues that will tell them if it's something that will really interest them. Our research tells us that that the two most read portions of any letter are the headline and the postscript, and they're actually read in that order. If we know this is the only thing the recipient might read, we have to summarize the whole letter in that postscript. Make it powerful and dynamic. Reword your offer, bonus and sense of urgency. It never hurts to say it again: "P.S. You must place your order by May 15th to receive your free consultation and bonus CD." The postscript is often left out by mistake because by the time you get around to writing it, you might be running out of steam – but you can't make that mistake. Don't let a sales letter leave your office without a postscript.

Now, you're not necessarily going to have separate paragraphs for each of these elements and they might not be in this exact order. It might be possible or even advisable to combine some of them together, such as the offer and call to action. Your "offer" might be clear in the headline or transition. But the important point here is that a great sales letter should utilize these elements to make it a success.

Let's sum up: so far, we have looked at how powerful a marketing letter can be in helping you to achieve a variety of business objectives; and we have discussed 11 specific elements you can include in your own sales letters for optimal results.

In Part 3, we'll focus on specific tips you can use in creating your letter, whether you decide to write it yourself or bring in a professional copywriter to support you. Lastly, we'll wrap things up by talking about the two other important pieces of a truly effective marketing letter campaign.

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