



54 Writing a good sales letter

What is a sales letter?

A sales letter can introduce your product or services to potential customers. Its aim can be to pre-sell your service in advance of a follow-up sales telephone call. A sales letter can also stand alone as a 'sales person' in print and aim to do the complete sales task from start to finish. Sales letters can be sent direct mail or email.

Why is it important?

A sales letter can be a valuable part of your sales and marketing process. Well written sales letters can persuade and influence your customers to buy, either directly from the letter or from you when you make your follow up telephone call. They allow you to target and communicate with more potential customers than you could physically talk to at any one time. Sales letters can warm customers up prior to a telemarketing campaign.

Your challenge

Your challenge is to write a letter that gets read and responded to. Everybody receives so much mail these days in the post and via email that your letter needs to be good to stand out. Most of us scan letters very quickly and if nothing grabs our attention or stands out as being relevant and appealing then they tend to go straight in the bin.

How to write letters that sell

Know what your objective is

Before you start typing you need to know what you want your letter to achieve.

Know who you are targeting

It is also important to be clear about who you are targeting and what their interests and problems are. This will help you to write copy that communicates directly with these people and provides solutions to their problems.

Write as if you are writing to one person

When you are writing put yourself into the shoes of the person you are writing to. Imagine that person as a friend and you are writing your message just for them. Even though this letter may go out to hundreds of people, each person will read it individually.

Be personal – use ‘you’ and ‘your’

If you include plenty of ‘you’ and ‘yours’ in your letter it will come across as if you are talking to the reader personally. You will be more likely to make a connection with the reader this way. Using ‘you’ and ‘yours’ shows the reader that you are focusing on them and their interests.

Get the reader’s attention from the start

Headlines that communicate something immediately of value to the target reader will get their attention.

- A major benefit.
- A question that they have to say ‘yes’ to.
- An amazing fact or piece of research.
- Something new or different.
- An amazing opportunity.

The headline is the opening sentence and the first thing that is read. Use a spot colour to emphasise its importance.

Make it look easy to read

Readers will make a decision to read a letter or not very quickly. If the headline has successfully grabbed their attention and the letter looks easy on the eye there is more chance of it getting read. Short paragraphs with sub-headlines that highlight the main benefits, well spaced out will make the letter look attractive and pleasant to read.

Write as you talk

Imagine that you are going to have a conversation with someone and tell them all

about the solution you have for them. Use easy to understand, plain English. Jargon and long words have the potential to bore and confuse. Be friendly and personable as if you were speaking to a friend.

Keep your sentences short

Short sentences keep people's attention.

Simplify

Eliminate excess wording. Be clear and concise in the points that you make. For letters you are sending in the post one A4 sheet is best. Scrolling email letters can be longer as long as the approach and language is kept simple and straightforward.

Sell the benefits

Show that you understand the target readers' problems and explain the solutions you have for them. Talk about what your product or service can do for them and the outcomes they can expect to be satisfied. Make sure that you communicate your unique selling proposition.

Include an action line

At the end of any letter you will want your readers to take a next step. You need to ask them to do that. If the next step to expect is a call from you within a defined time period then you must communicate that.

The power of a good PS

After the headline, the PS is the most read part of the letter, so you need to come up with a compelling PS. Your PS can be used to reinforce a key selling point or place some urgency on the response required.

Proof-read

As your sales letter represents you and your business there is nothing worse than it going out with spelling or grammatical errors. It is best practice to get all your written sales and marketing materials double-checked by a professional proof-reader.

Read aloud before you send

When you read a letter you read it aloud in your head. Reading it aloud yourself once it has been completed is a great way of uncovering anything that doesn't quite work.

The structure of a simple sales letter

Dear [name of person]
Main Attention Grabbing Headline
Introduction Highlight target readers' problems
Benefit-orientated sub-headline <i>Key sales points and solutions</i>
Benefit-orientated sub-headline <i>Key sales points and solutions</i>
Benefit-orientated sub-headline <i>Key sales points and solutions</i>
Benefit-orientated sub-headline <i>Key sales points and solutions</i>
Summary of main reasons to buy
Action line
Sign off
PS

How to use this information

Make sure that, if you are using a sales letter to pre-sell your services prior to a telecampaign, you make your call no more than three days after you send the letter.

Leave it longer than that and you risk the person forgetting about the letter no matter how well written it is.

If you have been using sales letters check them against the information you have here. How could you improve them?

Think sales letter and sell in print