Direct Mail
MASTER'S TOOLKIT
SERIES

TEXT Module 2
Copy

Writing is an art; writing for direct mail is a science.

There are rules to follow if you want your piece to resonate with your audience and generate action. Focus on being memorable, informative and succinct—and adding a little humor or personality never hurts.

The Headline

First things first—do you have a headline that grabs? A headline determines the effectiveness of the entire piece. Typically 8 out of 10 people will read the headline, but only 2 out of 10 will continue reading. You need a headline that immediately grabs attention, informs and sells.

Here are eight examples of proven headline tactics:

1

The Point, Please
No jokes, playfulness, or excess words—just get to the point.

Example:
Headlines are the most important part of direct mail

2

Big Beautiful Benefits
State the big benefit. If they see nothing else, at least you gave the selling point.

Example:
Free headline with every order over $100

3

Recite The News
News seems less intrusive than sales. Structure copy in the form of a bulletin.

Example:
PrintingForLess.com introduces the newest trend in writing headlines

4

Show Me How
A how-to is a proven method which appeals to consumers' needs to improve themselves or their environment. Focus on the result, not the process.

Example:
How to write a winning headline in just minutes

5

Excuse Me?
Asking an intriguing question pulls the reader in and forces them to read on for the answer.

Example:
Are you making the number one mistake of all headline writers?

6

Thou Shalt Do Something
Command in a friendly way, and your headline will convince without seeming desperate or pushy.

Example:
Stop writing headlines that suck. Call PrintingForLess.com for help!

7

Information Is Power
Customers want tips, tricks, and solutions, not endless facts and stats.

Example:
Mini web series explains how to write effective headlines that sell

8

Hey, It Worked for Me
Testimonials are a useful tactic, especially when the endorsement is straightforward, confident and honest.

Example:
"PFL's headline course made me a more effective writer in just five weeks."

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The Call-to-Action/Offer

The second most critical element is the call-to-action/offer. In the strategy module, we talked about having a singular focus for your piece. That is also true with the offer. Clearly identify your focused offer or benefit and stick to supporting it with other elements. Like headlines, offers have rules too.

ACT NOW!

Be Specific

Don't simply say, "contact us for more information." Specifically ask them to visit your site and give the address or direct them to social media using your Twitter handle or Facebook Profile.

Be Relevant

Make sure your offer is relevant to the audience. A mortgage refinancing offer will not be particularly helpful to the recent college grad while an offer for a new cell phone with social media and photo capabilities might not appeal to the 65+ crowd.

Be Exclusive

Exclusivity can be anything that feels special or unique, giving your audience something they can only get with your direct mailer. You can segment the offer to a loyal customer with, "Because you are one of our favorite customers," or a more acquisition-focused piece that says, "First-time customers get 25% off."

Be Obvious

Customers won't feel secretly rewarded after they scour your piece and find that cleverly-hidden offer. They want it bold, upfront and clearly defined.

Be Timely

Time-sensitive offers are an excellent way to spur immediate action. Create urgency by limiting redemption periods or events to a set amount of time. This tactic also allows for more accurate tracking.

Here are some of the most popular offers:

- Buy one, get one free
- Price discount
- Try-before-you-buy
- Free sample
- A prize awarded for a specified action
- Be the first!
- Complete a survey
- Information/education
- Consultation – free or reduced

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Body Copy

Besides your headline and offer, you'll need supporting body copy. Keep it short and concise and restate the offer.

Short and Snappy

Limit body copy to three paragraphs or less consisting of three to five sentences. Avoid complex sentence structure. Breaking up body copy into bullets, subheaders and adding extra spacing helps keep the reader focused and organized as they navigate the piece. Repeat the offer or benefits in a slightly different way to reinforce the message.

Tone

If you want the reader to do something, you must first make them feel something. If you are selling a new car, paint a picture for your customers of how great they will look or perform in their new car. Write in a human, conversational tone to avoid sounding like a robot.

Tell them a story. Story formats are more successful because the audience can connect. Walk your audience through a complete picture of how your service or product will make them more efficient, healthier, happier, etc. Incorporating wit, humor, or intrigue are excellent tools to keep your audience engaged.

Here are two examples of headlines and supporting body copy. Which one would you choose?

1 **Headlines in Critical Demand**
Take 40% off our writing course when you sign up online

Writing a headline can be a daunting task—until now. Write headlines that sell in a matter of minutes with our proven method and highly effective teachers. You'll walk away with the confidence to write winning headlines for successful direct mail that engages your audience.

2 **World-Wide Shortage of Headlines Causes Writers to Panic!**
Shortage creates savings of $100 off when you register on our website

Don't panic. We've got your back. Our team of world-class writers and our no-fail method will have you churning out winning headlines in your sleep. Direct mail gets a new lease on life with headlines that actually sell and build a lasting, engaged relationship with your audience. Call today – it's not too late!

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Additional Info

Don't forget the basics. If you want customers to come see your new store, include your phone number, address and directions. Contact information has evolved to include Facebook, Twitter and websites, so if you have digital channels, include them. This helps drive online behavior and creates a multi-channel experience with your brand. With digital information at customers' fingertips, most will go online to research before they ever make a purchase.

Fonts

There are some beautiful fonts out there, but not all **translate to a clear, quick read**. The best fonts for direct mail are san serif (does not have the small projecting feature at the end of the stroke). I suggest Arial, Century Gothic, Gill Sans, Helvetica, Optima, Tahoma and Verdana. These are standard system fonts.

Variable Data

Variable data is a form of digital printing, including on-demand printing, in which elements such as text, graphics and images may be changed from one printed piece to the next, without stopping or slowing down the printing process and using information from a database or external file. For example, a set of **personalized** letters, each with the same basic layout, can be printed with a different name, address and product picture on each letter.

Additional Resources

- **The Copywriters Handbook**

- **The Definitive Guide to Copywriting**

- **Variable Data**

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COPY, MESSAGING, AND OFFER
CHEAT SHEET

1

There are eight proven methods of headlines. **What is your headline?**

1. Direct
2. Benefits
3. News
4. How-to
5. Questions
6. Command (nicely)
7. Informative
8. Testimonial

2

Offers characteristics are: specific, relevant, exclusive, obvious and time-sensitive. Offer examples are:

- Buy one, get one free
- Try-before-you-buy
- A prize awarded for a specified action
- Complete a survey
- Consultation – free or reduced
- Price discount
- Free sample
- Be the first!
- Information/education

3

Body copy should be short and concise, limited to three paragraphs or less consisting of three to five sentences. Avoid complex sentence structure and use bullets and whitespace. **Always proof your work!**

4

Make the reader feel something. Tell them a story.

5

Don't forget basics like phone number, address and directions. If you have digital channels, include them.

6

Suggested fonts include Arial, Century Gothic, Gill Sans, Helvetica, Optima, Tahoma and Verdana.

7

Variable data allows each printed piece to have different elements from the others, including text and pictures. **Can you make your piece more personalized?**