

Great Leads

The Six Easiest Ways to
Start Any Sales Message

Michael Masterson & John Forde

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Great Leads

The Six Easiest Ways to Start Any Sales Message

Michael Masterson & John Forde



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Introduction

An Amazingly Powerful Strategy for Direct Response Success



If you are a copywriter intent on improving your skills, don't read this book ... Memorize it.

This book reveals in detail a very powerful strategy for writing breakthrough copy. It will change the way you think about sales copy. It will change the way you write sales copy. It will make you a far more skilled — and successful — copywriter.

And, it does this by giving you a tool you can use to beat “controls” by a factor of two-to-ten.

Learn this strategy and you will never have to worry about writing a dud. All your promotions will perform extremely well because your prospects will read them with a high level of interest and excitement.

Although just a few years old, this strategy is already responsible for hundreds of millions of dollars in sales for the businesses we consult with. And, promotions using this strategy are getting even better profits as we learn more about how it works and how to employ it.

What you are about to learn is entirely new. Although we have been studying the craft of copywriting for a combined 60 years, the idea behind this strategy was hatched in 2007, tested with our clients between then and 2010, and is only now being made available to the public.

If you learn this strategy — and it can easily be learned — you can expect certain immediate benefits:

You will start producing stronger, more compelling copy

The results of your efforts will improve and your clients (or employer) will notice

The demand for your writing will skyrocket

As a result, you will earn more money — perhaps multiples of what you are earning now

If that weren't enough, you will also:

Waste almost no time figuring out how to “begin” your sales copy

Write virtually every ad or promotion with confidence knowing that your copy will work

You should be able to read this book in a single day. It will be an exciting first read because you will

be discovering new ideas that boost the quality and effectiveness of your copy.

By this time tomorrow, you will be able to put some of the techniques to work. But, we recommend you reread the book several times during the next few weeks. With each reading, new secrets will be opened up for you.

This strategy becomes more powerful as you become more adept at using it. In the hands of a Master Copywriter, it becomes a “magic wand,” doubling and tripling the power of your copy every time you use it.

In the next few years, dozens of self-styled copywriting gurus will be teaching this strategy as if it were their own. This has already happened with other copywriting techniques we’ve introduced to the industry. There is no reason why it won’t happen again.

By keeping this book as a personal resource, you won’t have to worry about forgetting any of the details. Everything you need to understand this strategy and put it into action is contained in the following pages. And, since it is coming from two of the three people who invented and refined it, you are getting it undiluted straight from the source.

How Did We Come Up With This Crazy Idea?

When we were new to copywriting, we read everything we could find on the subject and attended dozens of seminars. Most of the experts back then had a similar pedagogical approach. They taught the craft of copywriting by providing their students with dozens or even hundreds of rules. Rules such as:

Always write in the second person.

Never have a headline that is more than seven words.

Use red or black headlines but never blue or green.

Always give away a premium.

Always provide a money-back guarantee.

Fill your copy with proven power words such as “now” and “free.”

These rules often were accompanied by statistical “proof” of their effectiveness. One guru in particular would astound his audience with rules and statistics like the following:

Using an envelope teaser will increase response rates by 25%.

Positioning an information product as a “club” will boost returns by 37%.

Manila envelopes jack up response rates by 15%.

And so on ... *ad nauseum*.

We were always suspicious of that sort of advice. If copywriting could be learned by following a set of static rules, then it would be easy to learn and there would be thousands of super-successful copywriters out there happily plying their trade.

But, in fact, there were very few super-successful copywriters.

When we looked carefully at our own successes and failures, we decided that the problem with rules and techniques was that they tend to be true only in very specific cases. For every rule that applied to one situation, there was a different situation to which it did not apply.

We found it was more effective to teach the *big things* — the rhetorical ideas that are eternal and

profound and universal. It is the big ideas — not the little ones — that create breakthrough copy.

So, instead of using rules and secrets to teach our group of up-and-coming copywriters one year, we had them study dozens of the great sales letters of the past. Then, we told them the underlying secrets behind the successful promotions.

Soon after this experiment, we incorporated what we knew in a new copywriting program we introduced to American Writers & Artists Inc. (AWAI).

Since 1997, that program has been refined and improved at least a half-dozen times. We have been part of the process to improve it. It is now, we believe, the very best program for learning copywriting of its kind.

And, our most recent refinement is the strategy laid out in this book.

What Most Copywriting Teachers Won't Teach You

This is a book about one small part of the advertisement — the few hundred words, what copywriters call *the lead*.

The lead was not much talked about when we were learning the copywriting game. Back then, Master Copywriters talked about features, benefits, proof, claims, and other elements of copy, but not the structure of the direct response advertisement: that every well-formed sales letter has a beginning, a middle, and an end.

Of the three, the beginning (or lead) is the most important. It is the first thing the prospect reads and the one chance you have of persuading him emotionally. If you don't do that in the lead, you will lose him, regardless of what you do later on.

Pareto's Law — How it Works in Direct Marketing

You've heard of Pareto's Law. Loosely defined, it says that 80% of the value of any business or endeavor comes from only 20% of its matter.

You may have noticed, for example, that 80% of the profitable sales of your business are generated by 20% of your customers. Likewise, 80% of the successful advertising campaigns you conduct are generated by 20% of the copywriters who work for you.

At the level of advertising, Pareto's Law also holds true. About 80% of the emotional impact of any piece of advertising copy will be determined by the first 20% of the copy.

That brings us back to the proposition stated previously: ***when it comes to writing breakthrough copy, the lead is, by far, the most important part.***

We have been making this point to direct marketers and copywriters for many years now. In the beginning, the idea was greeted with skepticism. "How is it possible that a few hundred words could have such an impact?" the Doubting Thomases asked.

And so, we proved it to them by testing two otherwise-identical sales letters that had two distinctly different leads. And overwhelmingly, one would significantly outperform the other. One might get, for example, a response rate of one-half of one percent. The other would respond at double or triple that. Nothing else would be changed. Just the leads. It was the leads that made such a profound difference.

Eventually the disbelievers were converted.

Nowadays, most marketing experts and copywriting coaches accept the importance of the lead. They

have seen the tests. They can't dispute the facts.

If this proposition is new to you and you're unsure of its truth, consider what these renowned, successful copywriters have to say about the power of the lead ...

"You can create a brilliant offer for a product or service everybody wants. But, unless the lead is a 'grabber,' you won't be competitive. Shortened attention spans and increased skepticism have added new rules for an effective lead."

— Herschell Gordon Lewis

"The headline gets attention. The lead either forges an instant connection with the reader — or the package fails."

— Bob Bly

"The headline and lead are 80% of the package. If you don't have those, you have nothing. And, the rest is journeyman writing."

"That is what separates the great writers from the ordinary. Ordinary writers write ordinary leads. Great writers think of intriguing and powerful ideas ..."

"It is the hook that makes a great package — if you involve them there, your chances of success improve incalculably. The more you involve, the more you succeed."

— Don Mahoney

"30 seconds — that's how long I've got to grab my prospect and get him hooked with my lead. So, never save the 'good stuff' for later in the copy — it may never get read!"

— Carline Anglade-Cole

"The lead is important because it not only makes the promise, but determines the role you'll be playing in your presentation of the opportunity ... and kind of 'relationship' you'll have with the reader for those next 10 or so minutes. And, that's something that will have a very positive (or negative) impact on the success of any package."

— Paul Hollingshead

"In my experience, the lead is about 75% of the work. Finding a really compelling idea ... and figuring out how to express it in a unique and compelling way (in two pages of copy) is by far the most important part of any package. The rest of your promotion can be very formulaic ... because you've already done the most difficult and important work in the lead."

— Mike Palmer

Why the Lead is So Damn Important

Are you with us? Good. Let's spend a few minutes discussing why exactly the lead is so important.

Direct response advertising copy is different from brand advertising. Its purpose is to produce an

immediate, positive action. To create that response, you need to do more than catch the reader's attention. You need to do more than entertain him. You need to do more than leave him with a positive impression of the product.

With direct response advertising, you need to provoke *action*. And to do that, you must accomplish two important objectives:

1. You must move the prospect emotionally.
2. You must persuade him intellectually.

Both jobs are equally important. But, to write breakthrough ads or promotions, you must do the emotional persuasion first.

Experienced copywriters discovered this truth and were using it to write the great classics of the past. Consider this famous advertisement from 1926 that ran for 40 years:



Do You Make These Mistakes in English?

Max Sackheim — the author of this much-imitated ad — could have started out by giving statistics (if any existed) about how much mistakes in English reduced a businessman's earning power.

But, he didn't. Instead, he appealed to the emotion of insecurity.

You can see this appeal to emotion at work in a much more recent advertisement, this one by Bottomline.

What never...ever to eat on an airplane!

The dirtiest, deadliest airline in the whole world

This lead plays on one of the most powerful (and frequently, poorly-used) emotions in persuasive arguments: Fear. There's nothing subtle about this approach. The prospect reads it, and the fears this headline and the subsequent lead arouse force him to keep reading.

But, print ads are not the only ones that use emotional hooks to grab the prospective buyer's attention. We are sure you are familiar with this much-quoted ad. Before reading on, *you* provide the words:



Of course, this is the “I’ve fallen and can’t get up” ad by LifeCall. It ran for about a year in 1989 to 1990. But its imagery, catchphrase, and play on fear were so strong that it is still quoted over 20 years later.

This seems to be the way the brain works: when it comes to making most decisions, we begin by generating an emotional preference and only then subject that preference to logical debate.

Another way of saying that is that first we find ourselves wanting to buy a product and then begin the rationalization process of deciding if we should.

The mind is slave to the heart.”
— Mahatma Gandhi

The reason this is true has *everything* to do with the way the brain processes information and makes decisions.

Studies reported in the journal *Nature Neuroscience*, for example, have pinpointed the parts of the brain that are most active when someone is thinking about buying something: The limbic system, the amygdala, and the posterior cingulated cortex.

These are the emotional parts of your brain.

The UCLA Brain Research Institute said this about the prospect's brain and how best to talk to it:

“Corporate America, meanwhile, is hoping brain scanning can help sales. The big question for neuroeconomics is, ‘How does the human brain make decisions like which car to buy or what to have for lunch,’ says Antonio Rangel, director of the neuroeconomics lab at Stanford. Research is showing that the limbic system, which governs emotions, often overrides the logical areas of the brain, suggesting that the ‘rational actor’ theory of economics misses deeper sources of motivation rooted in unconscious feelings and interpersonal dynamics. Instead of aiming at consumers’ logical decision-making processes, companies could perhaps appeal to the fuzzier side of how people feel about themselves and others around them.”

But, persuading someone doesn't have to feel like brain surgery. All it really means is that as copywriters, we must recognize our first job is to win over the prospect's heart. Once we do that, then the rest of our job — winning over his mind — is relatively easy.

Time is a big factor in this. The customer doesn't have time to read every promotion that comes his way. He will give each a few minutes or seconds depending on how good the copy is. If he becomes bored or confused or doubtful, he will stop reading and move on to the next thing in his reading pile.

Those precious few moments are all you have to persuade him emotionally. In such a short space of time, you don't have time to put forth a rational argument. And even if you could, you would lose the chance to capture his heart.

In a typical long-form direct response advertisement (whether it's a sales letter, a space ad, a television spot, or a telemarketing script), you have just 100 to 600 words to incite an emotional response. Those 100 to 600 words constitute the lead. And *that* is why the lead is so important.

We once worked with a very successful direct marketer who was famous for his ability to predict very quickly how well advertising copy would work. He never spent more than two minutes reading the copy. He'd read the lead word-for-word and then quickly scan the rest of the copy.

It might have been he who taught us the importance of the lead. Or, perhaps we inferred it from watching him do his thing. But, when we began to concentrate on the leads, we found that we, too, could predict the success of promotions with a fair amount of accuracy.

We could read the lead and ask, “Does this lead get me excited? Does it make me want to continue reading with a high level of anticipation?”

If the lead accomplished these tasks, then we felt with a high degree of confidence that the promotion would work.

As we said, most copywriting experts today recognize the critical role the lead has on the success of the ad. But until now, there has never been a book that took a scientific approach to analyzing great leads and demonstrating the principles that made them work so well.

In the chapters that follow, we will walk you through our strategy. To put it to work for you, we will teach you a few important strategies:

■ The importance of the lead (You have just learned that.)

■ A unifying principle called the Rule of One that immediately will make *all* your writing stronger and more effective

■ The difference between a direct and an indirect lead

Gene Schwartz's concept of reader familiarity

The six archetypal lead types

The rules for each of these six types

That is how this book is arranged. There are 10 chapters, one each explaining these concepts in detail and with plenty of examples.

The strategy you're about to learn will easily put an extra million dollars in your pocket over the lifespan of your career. More likely, if you are an active, full-time copywriter, the value will be many times that.

How this can happen is quite simple. This strategy makes you write compelling copy more effectively — without relying on numerous and often contradictory “rules.”

Your prospect will feel a stronger, more real bond with you and with your writing. And, your efforts to “sell him” will fade into the background so that he concentrates on your words and ideas and not on having to fork over money.

This strategy allows you to write effective, compelling copy more quickly with far fewer false starts and time-wasting restarts. Because you understand this strategy, you'll know how best to approach your reader. And, you'll know what approaches to avoid that will not work as effectively with him.

You'll notice how much more effortlessly your writing seems to flow. So will your client or employer. Most importantly, the reader will enjoy an easy, unlabored flow of words that lead him inevitably to the action you want him to take.

When you put our simple strategy to work for you, you'll write every advertisement or promotion confidently, knowing that it will *work*.

Put it all together and this means more work for you, finished faster, garnering more success. And, more money coming to you — multiples of what you're earning now while expending a lot less labor.

Here's how Master Copywriter David Deutsch characterizes why you want to be writing great leads:

“A good lead may intrigue, build curiosity, create anticipation, open the reader's mind, build trust, create a bond, and in a myriad of ways lay the groundwork for (and magnify the effectiveness of) the persuasion to follow.

“A great one — ‘If the list on which I found your name ... ’ ‘The American Express Card is not for everyone ... ’ ‘You look out your window ... ’ — can in itself elevate the reader to an entirely different level of susceptibility to our enticements.”

The book you're holding represents a tiny investment compared to what you stand to earn using this strategy. All you have to do now — to turn that tiny benefit into a financial windfall — is to read on and pay attention to what you are reading ... and then to put it into action.

But that's easy, as you'll see as you continue reading ...

The Rule of One — One Big Idea



“There is a certain majesty in simplicity which is far above all the quaintness of wit.”

— Alexander Pope

One of the biggest lessons I ever learned about writing leads came very late — in fact, more than twenty years after I wrote my first piece of copy.

It happened about a year after I began writing *Early to Rise* (ETR). I was looking over the issues I had written that year, and noting which ones the readers rated the highest. Without exception, those that achieved the highest scores presented a single idea.

I realized readers didn’t want to hear everything I had to say about a topic every time I fired up my computer. They were looking for a single, useful suggestion or idea that could make them more successful.

That was one of those “a-ha!” experiences for me.

As a reader, the stories and essays I liked best tackled one subject, however narrow, and did so effectively and deeply. As a writer, I had a sense that my readers should feel this way, too. But, it wasn’t until I looked at the ETR results that I recognized the power of a narrow focus in writing.

I thought about some of the books I admired the most. Most of them had that narrow focus. Many of them centered on a single idea.

What Color Is Your Parachute? by Richard Bolles — Finding a life-changing new job that you love.

The Tipping Point by Malcolm Gladwell — How trends develop and fortunes are made from them.

Scientific Advertising by Claude Hopkins — A philosophy that advertising’s purpose is to sell, not entertain or win creative awards — and how to apply this philosophy to create winning ads.

How to Become CEO by Jeffrey J. Fox — How to become a great employee and, eventually, take over the business.

Seven Habits of Highly Effective People by Steven Covey — The behaviors you need to adopt in your

professional and personal life to become successful.

How to Win Friends and Influence People by Dale Carnegie — How to use personal power to achieve success.

My next thought was to see if this same phenomenon applied to advertising copy. I pulled out my box of “best promotions of all time” and went through them. Not all of them were on a single topic, but many of them began by hitting one idea strongly.

It seemed like I was on to something. When we had our first company-wide meeting for publishers in France, I presented this as one of several dozen “secrets to publishing success.”

Bill Bonner, who was there, reminded me that he had been telling me about the Rule of One for many years. He learned it, he said, from the great advertising guru David Ogilvy. Ogilvy called it “the Big Idea.” The concept was that every great promotion has, at its core, a single, powerful idea.

Here are Ogilvy’s exact words on the crucial importance of the Big Idea:

“Big Ideas. Unless your advertising is built on a Big Idea, it will pass like a ship in the night. It takes a Big Idea to jolt the consumer out of his indifference — to make him notice your advertising, remember it, and take action. Big Ideas are usually simple ideas. Said Charles Kettering, the great General Motors inventor: ‘This problem, when solved, will be simple.’ Big, simple ideas are not easy to come by. They require genius — and midnight oil. A truly big one can be continued for 20 years — like our eye patch for Hathaway shirts.”

And, my co-author John Forde said that he, too, has used the Big Idea to write some of his best promotions.

The next year, I invited two of Agora’s most successful writers to make presentations at the annual meeting. One gave a very impressive speech about the 12 rules he follows when he writes copy. The other copywriter — Steve Sjuggerud — talked about only one thing: The importance of clarity in writing.

Both presentations were terrific. But, it was Steve’s speech that people were talking about afterwards. And, it was Steve’s idea that became institutionalized at Agora that year.

At the same time, John told us he was rereading the classic 1941 book, “*How to Write a Good Advertisement*” by Victor Schwab, the man *Advertising Age* called the “greatest mail-order copywriter of all time.”

In that book, Schwab lists what he called the “Top 100 Headlines” of his time. John found that in that list, 91 were driven by single ideas.

Yet, even the remaining 9 not clearly based on a single idea still had an implied strong, single idea that bound the whole thing together.

Take a look. And remember, this is the list of headlines that DON’T appear at first to fit the single-idea theme we’re talking about ...

“Five Familiar Skin Troubles — Which Do You Want to Overcome?”

“Have You These Symptoms of Nerve Exhaustion?”

“161 New Ways to a Man’s Heart — In This Fascinating Book for Cooks”

“Do You Do Any of These Ten Embarrassing Things?”

“Six Types of Investors — Which Group Are You In?”

“The Crimes We Commit Against Our Stomachs”

“Little Leaks That Keep Men Poor”

“67 Reasons Why It Would Have Paid You to Answer Our Ad a Few Months Ago”

“Free Book — Tells You 12 Secrets of Better Lawn Care”

“Notice,” John said in a *Copywriter’s Roundtable* article discussing the Rule of One, “that even though they don’t, each clearly points toward a single, over-arching theme.”

Now, take a look at some of the other 91 “best headlines” of Schwab’s time. Note how instantly clear and engaging these “Big Ideas” are.

“The Secret of Making People Like You”

“Is the Life of a Child Worth \$1 to You?”

“To Men Who Want to Quit Work Someday”

“Are You Ever Tongue-Tied at a Party?”

“How a New Discovery Made a Plain Girl Beautiful”

“Who Else Wants a Screen Star Figure?”

“You Can Laugh at Money Worries — If You Follow This Simple Plan”

“When Doctors Feel Rotten This is What They Do”

“How I Improved My Memory in One Evening”

“Discover the Fortune That Lies Hidden In Your Salary”

“How I Made a Fortune with a ‘Fool Idea’”

“Have You a ‘Worry’ Stock?”

John pointed out that starting off in the headline with just one, simple idea has two major benefits:

- It makes the copy stronger

- It makes writing the rest of the sales letter easier

“Finding the core idea,” John added, “of course, is the hard part. It has to be precise, not scattershot. You have to know your audience and know them well. Or, you risk missing your target completely.”

At ETR, we made this concept a “rule” of writing — the *Rule of One*. The mandate was very clear. Our contributors should write about one thing at a time. One good idea, clearly and convincingly presented, was better than a dozen so-so ideas strung together.

That rule made a difference. When we obeyed it, our essays were stronger. When we ignored it, they were not as powerful as they could have been.

Although this was clearly a copywriting principle that was extremely powerful, I found that I sometimes ignored it. If I had six good reasons for this, or 12 techniques for that, I couldn’t stop myself from including them all. The results were always disappointing.

Why did I break this golden rule? I’m not entirely sure. I think sometimes I was afraid readers would think, “Is that all he has to say on the subject?” I was, in other words, too cowardly and conceited to stick to my rule — even though I knew it would help me.

Non-Writing Applications of the Rule of One

The Rule of One can also be applied to your daily workday goals. Before you go into a meeting, think about what one thing you'd like to accomplish from it. Make that one thing your priority and hammer away at it during the meeting. You'll be amazed at how often you will end up leaving the meeting with your goal accomplished.

You can also use the Rule of One at business lunches, meetings, and even parties. Challenge yourself: "Who is the one best person I can network with?" and "What is the one best thing I can say to that person to capture his interest?"

Spend some time today looking at work you've done — ads you've written, products you've created, goals you've set. How could you make them stronger by applying the Rule of One?

Here is an example of the Rule of One as applied to a short advertorial, taken from an ETR message:

Subject Line: The Easiest Product to Sell Online

Dear Early to Riser,

Would you be interested in investing \$175 to make \$20,727?

That's exactly what Bob Bly just accomplished!

See how he did it below ... and how easily you could do the same.

MaryEllen Tribby

ETR Publisher

Dear Friend,

There's no product easier to create or sell online ...

... than a simple, straightforward instructional or how-to e-book.

Why are e-books the perfect information product to sell on the Internet?

- 100% profit margin.
- No printing costs.
- No inventory to store.
- Quick and easy to update.
- No shipping costs or delays.
- Higher perceived value than regular books.
- Quick, simple, and inexpensive to produce.

My very first e-book has generated \$20,727 in sales (so far).

My total investment in producing it: just \$175.

Now, I want to show you how to make huge profits creating and selling simple e-books — in my new e-book "Writing E-Books for Fun & Profit."

Normally my e-books sell for anywhere from \$29 to \$79, and later this year, “Writing E-Books for Fun & Profit” will sell for \$59.

However, to make it affordable for you to get started in e-book publishing, I’m letting you have “Writing E-Books for Fun & Profit” for only \$19 today — a savings of \$40 off the cover price!

For more information ... or to order on a risk-free 90-day trial basis ... just **click here now**.

Sincerely,
Bob Bly

P.S. But, I urge you to hurry. This special \$40 discount is for a **limited time only**. And once it expires, it may never be repeated again.

Let me explain how the Rule of One operates here.

In the lift letter (signed by MaryEllen Tribby), Bob asks a question and then tells a tiny little story. The question is an inverted promise. The story — a single-sentence story, mind you — validates the promise.

The sales letter follows. This, too, is a beautifully simple piece of copy. It leads with a statement. The statement expresses an idea. The idea suggests a promise: the easiest way to make money on the Internet is to market e-books.

That statement is then supported by a number of bulleted “facts.” Then, Bob validates the statement by mentioning his own experience.

The reader is already sold. Bob makes the sale irresistible with a strong, one-time-only offer.

Short, sweet, and *simple*.

The Rule of One is *not* only one big, central idea. It’s a fully engaging piece of copy with five necessary elements. Using Bob’s example:

🕒 **One good idea:** “There’s no product easier to create or sell online than a simple, straightforward instructional or how-to e-book.”

🕒 **One core emotion:** “It is simple! I bet I can do it!”

🕒 **One captivating story:** Told brilliantly in 17 words: “Would you be interested in investing \$175 to make \$20,727? That’s exactly what Bob Bly just accomplished!”

🕒 **One single, desirable benefit:** “Now, I want to show you how to make huge profits creating and selling simple e-books ... ”

🕒 **One inevitable response:** The only way to get this book for \$19 is to “click here now.”

To create blockbuster promotions time-after-time, you must understand the difference between good copy and great copy. The Rule of One is the driving force behind *great* copy.

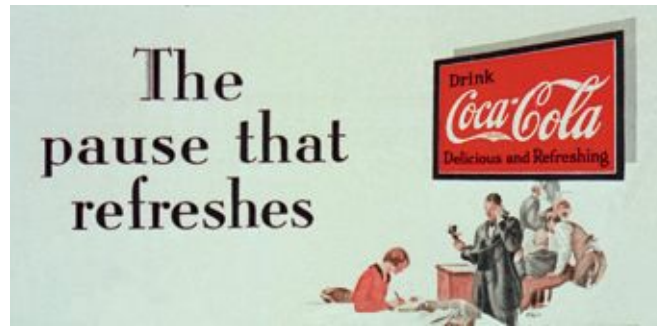
Veteran advertising consultant James Loftus, who has worked with Anheuser-Busch, Holiday Inn, and McDonald’s, among many other clients, agrees with this concept:

“Also keep in mind that the more points you try to cover, the less effective each point, and therefore your ad, will be. An effective ad will actually have only one central focus, even if you discuss it from two or three perspectives. If your points are too diverse, they compete with each other, and

end up pulling the reader's attention in separate directions."

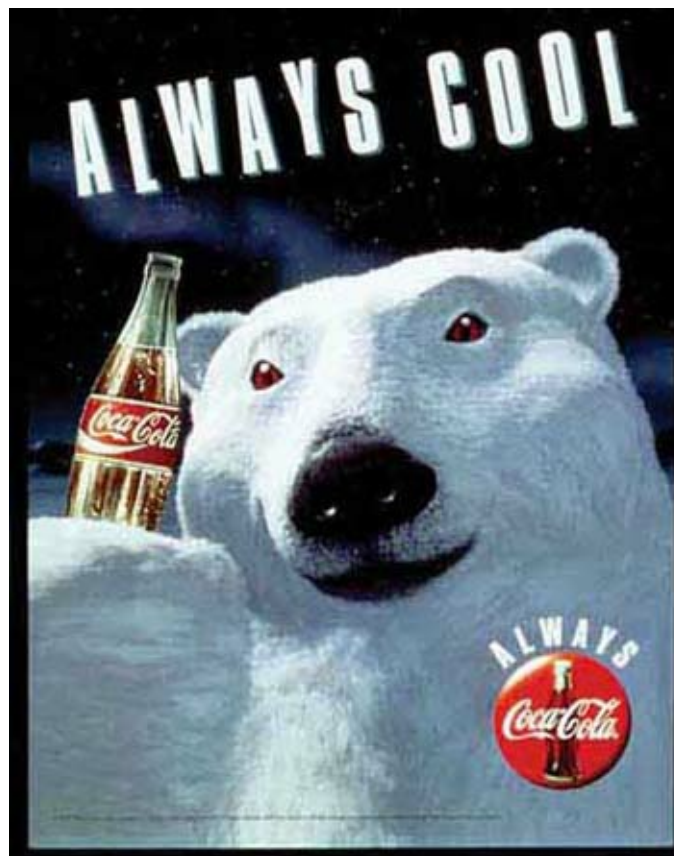
Think for a moment about a few modern ads and ad taglines you remember. Those that stick with you follow the Rule of One:

Coca Cola: "The pause that refreshes"®



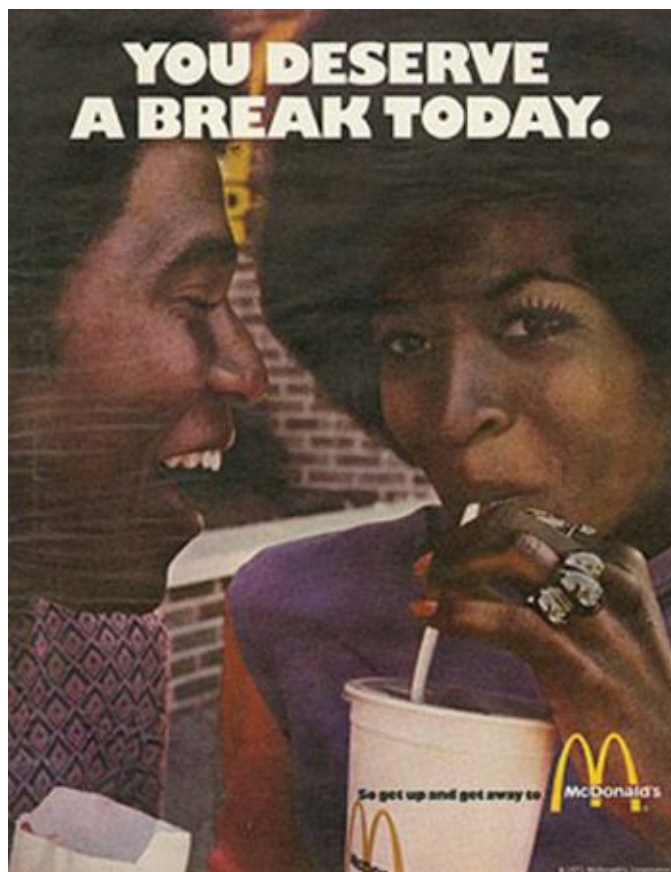
OR

"Always Cool."®



But *not* "The pause that refreshes and always cool."

McDonald's: "You deserve a break today"®



OR

“i’m lovin’ it”®



Not “You deserve a break today, and you’re lovin’ it.”

You run across numerous other examples of top companies following this rule in their most successful ads:

“We try harder”
[Avis]

“Think Different”
[Apple Computer]

“Pork, the other white meat”

[National Pork Board]

“Quality is job one”
[Ford Motor Company]

“Milk, it does a body good”
[National Dairy Council]

These are more than taglines. The commercials they embellished — when produced by ad execs who understood this rule — used one strong idea to drive the ads.

Porter Stansberry (founder of Stansberry & Associates Investment Research) recently wrote a memo explaining the great success he and Mike Palmer had with two blockbuster promotions. Both advertisements brought in millions of dollars within days of posting them. I won’t tell you all the secrets Porter revealed in his memo (Porter and Mike would kill me if I did) but I’ll tell you this: Each of the blockbuster promotions highlighted one dominant investing idea — not several.

The challenge is to find one good idea that the reader can grasp immediately, Porter said. And then, stick to it.

But, most marketers and copywriters are not up to this challenge. Instead of sticking to the Rule of One, they conjure up lists of features and benefits and create ads that mention as many of them as possible. The thinking behind this approach goes something like this: “I wonder which of these benefits will really push the buttons I want? Hmmm. I don’t know. I guess what I’ll do is throw them all in the promotion. That way if one doesn’t work, another one will.”

This is what I call the “tossed salad” approach to advertising copy. Throw everything on the counter into a big wooden bowl, marinate with some connecting sentences, and toss. It’s a standard recipe for B-level copywriters. But, it’s not the way to win any blue ribbons in the competitive kitchen of breakthrough advertising.

The little advertisement Bob wrote had that simplicity. *E-books are easy* was the idea. E-books are easy to make and easy to sell. The reader hears it. He gets it. He believes it.

So, the idea has to be strong. Yet, it also has to be easy to understand. *And* easy to believe. That last part — being easy to believe — is key.

The examples in this book follow this cardinal rule of copywriting: The Rule of One. As a general rule, leads that follow the Rule of One are stronger because they do not have the emotional power dissipated by copy that goes in different directions.

But, the Rule of One does not mean you can’t have a story and a secret and an emotionally-compelling fact in the same lead.

It means that the lead is strongest that promotes one compelling idea by supporting that idea with all the appropriate techniques ... stories, predictions, statements, promises, and so on ... but all unified by that single idea and by a single emotion that drives the sale.

For example, Porter’s Railway package — *There’s a Railroad Across America* — was both a Story and a Secret Lead. And, it had other elements in it as well. But, there was a single idea — that we are living in a time of change as great as the height of the Industrial Revolution. If you read this letter, you have a chance of becoming as rich as those great oil and railway barons. One compelling idea and one powerful emotion. The package worked because all the other competing ideas and emotions were

eliminated.

To reiterate the most important points:

Lead your advertisement with one, and only one, powerful idea

Make sure that the idea creates an emotion, a single emotion, which will compel the reader to respond

Support that idea with one engaging story or compelling fact

Direct the reader to one, and only one, action

What is a great advertising idea? That could be the subject of another book. But, in short, a great idea is:

Big (enough to stir interest)

Easy to understand

Immediately convincing

Clearly useful (to the reader)

Anybody who cares about marketing — and everybody in business should — needs to understand this core principle. Spend five or ten minutes now studying Bob Bly's little ad and understanding how it is working.

Put the Rule of One to work for you in *all* your communications, especially in your promotions and their leads. You'll be amazed at how much stronger — and successful — your copy will be.

The Simple Question That Can Double Your Success



“The skill of writing is to create a context in which other people can think.”

— Edwin Schlossberg

Ask a simple question, the next time — and every time — you start a piece of promotional copy, and you could see double or better the results you otherwise might get.

In fact, answer this same question and you’ll immediately find it a *lot easier* to make many of the same decisions most marketers and business owners find challenging.

For instance, you’ll have a much better idea which products will sell best to your target audience. You’ll also have a much better idea of the lead types, as detailed in this book, that will work best with that audience, too. Only certain ones fit at certain times. And, by asking this question, you’ll know how to decide among them.

You’ll even have a fair idea, once you ask this question, which words will work best in your headline, what the opening line of your sales piece should say, even a few ideas about the layout and design.

And, what question is that?

Seasoned marketers might think it’s “What am I selling?” or “Who is my customer?” And, in both cases, they wouldn’t be far off.

But, the real question too many marketers never stop to ask is this one: *“What does your customer already know?”*

What does he know, for instance, about who you are? What does he know about your product and the research behind it? What does he know about himself, his own problems, and the other possible solutions available?

Why does any of this matter?

It matters because it completely changes the way you’ll approach and talk to your customer. And, it’s this question of how you approach him that’s so different.

In this book, we're going to ask you to begin with exactly this premise: Everything your prospect knows *before you begin your sales pitch* will determine not just what you'll say, but how you'll say it, when you open the conversation between seller and buyer.

More specifically, what your reader knows will help you decide which of the following six lead types will work best. It's that simple.

We call this key premise the concept of “customer awareness.” And, we're not the first. It was the late, great copywriting legend Gene Schwartz who first wrote about this idea, in his classic book *Breakthrough Advertising*.

If you can get your hands on a copy — we've seen it sell “new” for as much as \$800 on Amazon.com — you should. It's worth every penny, just to get his brilliant and full treatment of the idea.

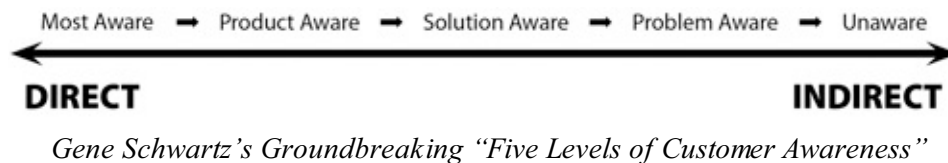
But, for our purposes here, you won't need to go so deep.

Let's just start by taking a look at how Gene himself put it:

“If [your prospect] is aware of your product and realizes it can satisfy his desire, your headline starts with your product. If he is not aware of your product, but only of the desire itself, your headline starts with the desire. If he is not yet aware of what he really seeks, but is concerned only with the general problem, your headline starts with that problem and crystallizes it into a specific need.”

In other words, even when you're selling the same product to everybody, the people you approach will respond only to one kind of ad — depending on how *aware* they are of who you are, what you're selling, and why you're selling it.

Schwartz even broke out what he called the “Five Levels of Awareness.” We've laid them out for you here, in a kind of “awareness line,” running from most to least aware:



So, how do you use this concept when making a marketing or copywriting decision?

First, you ask the simple question we have already mentioned: *What does your customer already know?* In other words, if you had to plot your prospect on the “awareness line” we diagramed, where would he land?

If your customer has already bought something from you before and loves your brand, then he's going to fall on the “most aware” end of the scale.

If he's never bought or heard of your product, but suspects there's something out there like what you sell but he doesn't know about your product specifically, then you might say he's “solution-aware.”

On the other hand, if he only knows the frustration of the problem he's trying to solve, he's better described as “problem-aware.” If he's not even that much in tune, and carries only a general angst that you'll need to channel, he falls into the category Schwartz labeled “unaware.”

As you'll see in the upcoming chapters, some leads will work extremely well to “most aware” customers but would most likely bomb to an “unaware” audience. The reverse is also true. Leads that can give you blockbuster success with “unaware” audiences would fall flat with customers that already know

you and your products well.

How do you discover where to put your target customer on that “awareness line”? Simply by drilling down with even more questions, as a detective might.

For instance, you might ask yourself how new your product is to the marketplace? If it’s very new, obviously customer awareness levels will be low. But then, you might also ask, is there anything else out there just like it? In which case, your target customer isn’t completely “unaware” — they already have a frame of reference.

Again, the simple key is that you understand this general concept. Simply put, knowing *how aware* your prospect is will change the conversation. And, it will especially change those first key moments of the conversation, which in advertising we call the *headline* and the *lead*.

Just to make sure you’re clear on how awareness levels can impact your message, let’s just spend a few minutes looking at each of the levels on Gene’s five-level scale ...

1. The Most Aware

Your prospect knows your product, and only needs to know “the deal.”

In a lot of ways, this is your dream customer. They know what they want. They know you offer it. And, at this stage, all that’s left is making the deal.

You’ll hear lots of talk these days about the importance of building a lasting relationship with customers. And even more, about how the Internet and email marketing have made that even easier.

And, this is why.

The “most aware” customer can be a very active, even assertive kind of customer. This is where you’ll find your repeat buyers. These are the people who feel loyal to your brand, who shake your hand, and who send you “fan” emails. In the best case, these are the customers who even recommend your product to friends.

Apple, for instance, has what some — especially hardcore Microsoft customers — call “fanboys.” They’re so devout, they’ll track rumor websites to find out about new product releases. Then, they’ll camp outside the retail stores to be among the first to buy.



Apple has famously built an avid fan base. Their “most aware” customers have often camped out overnight to be first in line for new products. ©Quintin Doroquez



The benefit of selling to highly aware customers? You can often reach them with something as simple as a straightforward offer, such as this one for the iPad.

No doubt, you also know someone who refuses to drive anything but a Chrysler, Ford, or Mercedes. Or, someone who buys tickets, T-shirts, and CDs of a favorite band or goes crazy over anything that has the logo of a favorite sports team. Even something as simple as Colgate, Crest, or Aquafresh toothpaste can build this level of loyalty in a crowd.

Selling at this level of awareness is easy.

Your target customers know you. They know what you do. There's no education required. Because for them, your product is more than a product. It's a point of contact with someone they now trust and feel emotionally connected to. More often than not, to this crowd, all you'll need to do is offer them something new and they'll buy.

Why?

Because not only are they already passionate in the niche where your product resides, but they've already answered many of their own questions. They're already emotionally ready to make a decision. And, almost all you'll need to do is give them the opportunity to buy.

The first lead we'll show you, featured in Chapter 4, can work great for this kind of highly-aware customer. What's more, it's among the easiest to write, once you've decided exactly what you're selling and whom you're selling to.

To figure out if you're selling to a "most aware" customer, you're going to look immediately at whatever kind of mailing list or slice of the market that's most available to you. For instance, in a company that markets often by direct response, they'll have a "house list." And on that list, they might also have what are called "multi-buyers."

These are the customers who bought before and who came back again for more. Most direct response marketers place high value on this list simply because, as "most aware" customers, they're much easier to sell. Most of the work has already been done, long before your copy comes along.

Keep in mind, in today's over-exposed, media-dense world, you might sometimes run into customers who seem *too* aware. These are the jaded ones, who have been hit too many times by similar pitches,

have tried products like yours that have let them down, or who have just reached a self-imposed limit on how much they're willing to spend.

In those special cases, they're not only "most aware" of who you are and what you offer, but also they've already made up their minds. And, you'll find it very difficult to change those opinions, even if they're not exactly right about what they think.

However, it's not impossible, as you'll see with the special lead types we'll talk about later, starting with Chapter 4. But, before you jump ahead, let's continue with Schwartz's other levels of customer awareness, as they might apply to the marketing situation you find yourself in right now.

2. Product-Aware

Your prospect knows what you sell, but isn't sure it's right for him.

Even for products that have fans, you're also going to find buyers sitting on the fence. And, that's mostly what you'll see at this second level. These are the prospects that just aren't sure what you're selling is right for them.

Do they know the name of your product? Yes. Do they know the benefits you claim? It's pretty likely. But, making up their minds whether to buy, that's a different story.

First, you'll need to win their trust. And, because they're not completely decided, they're skittish. So, you'll have to make sure you don't scare them away.

You'll find these kinds of prospects reading other customers' reviews on Amazon.com and poring over copies of *Consumer Reports*. Even though they're close to a purchase, they crave reassurance. They want and need to know you sell not only *what* they need, but that they can trust your claims about what your product or service can do.

Of course, that means you'll need to work that much harder to convince them. The good news is that with this kind of "product-aware" customer, at least part of the seller-buyer relationship has already begun.

That's why "product-aware" customers are often easier to win over. Because you still won't need to do much here to educate the customer about what you're doing. Most of your work will focus on proving you're able to do what you say you'll do.

Of course, every sale works to build buyer trust. But, with this kind of prospect, trust building becomes especially important. It's what you'll want to do as soon as possible in your copy. The lead type you'll read about in Chapter 5 will show you how that's done.

Once you move beyond these first two higher levels of customer awareness, selling gets a little tougher. And, this is where good copywriters start to earn their money. Why? Because it's here that resistance spikes higher and you'll need to work harder to make that first connection.

Let us show you what we mean ...

3. Solution-Aware

Your prospect knows the result he wants, but not that your product provides it.

Picture yourself craving a midnight snack. You're standing in the glow of the open refrigerator. You feel the hunger pangs. And, you know there's food in the house. But, you're just not sure what you want.

That's not so far off from being "solution-aware."

At this third level of Schwartz's Awareness Scale, the prospect knows that somewhere out there, somebody has a solution to his problem. He might even know vaguely where to look. Beyond that, he's not so sure where to look next.

A prospect in this category needs a little extra education before he's ready to compare his options. When he comes to you, this third-level customer has only an *outcome* in mind.

To make the sale, you show him you're able to help him reach that outcome. But, before you can do that, you'll first need to convince him you understand what he wants and needs.

An ad like this goes beyond the simple offer, with more claims and proof, to sell to a slightly "less aware" prospect.

At least two of the kinds of lead types we'll show you — in Chapters 5 and 6 — will help you do this, as you'll see.

And then, we start to move into the customer awareness levels where making a solid connection gets much tougher and much more important. So, why target these buyers?

Because it's in these last two categories where you're going to find the customers that help businesses *grow*.

4. Problem-Aware

Your prospect senses he has a problem, but doesn't know there's a solution.

A "solution-aware" customer has hope. But, a "problem-aware" customer has only worry. They know something's not working, but they don't know yet there's a way to fix it.

**"In the future, this is how
people will soothe stiff
joints and ease discomfort.**

"Only *you* don't have to wait.

You can start right now!" *Dr. David Williams*



Dear Friend,

If you had seen Maureen Caron that day, you'd know why she needed a miracle.

Terrible joint problems, especially in her knees, hips and ankles, made a "normal life" nearly impossible. Things got so bad, doing everything—even the little things—became a difficult task. She even needed help just to stand up in church.

Maureen first turned to natural supplements, like

please turn...

CALL TOLL FREE 1-800-888-1415

3

Notice how this ad taps the emotions attached to the problem of "stiff joints" and "discomfort" before it actually reveals anything about the product.

The key with this customer is to show you "feel their pain." Not just that you know they have a problem, but that you know the frustration, desperation, or even fear and anger it causes. We call this the "point of maximum anxiety." Once you identify it, you'll find an open avenue for making an emotional connection.

This kind of copy says loud and clear "I sympathize," before it even tries to begin to name benefits or mention products. Many classic ads fall into this category.

In Chapter 6, you'll see specific examples. Plus, you'll see how to connect with the key selling emotions that make this special kind of lead work. And in Chapter 7, you'll discover a lead type which can also be very effective for prospects keenly aware of what ails them.

And finally, there's the toughest and yet potentially most rewarding of the customer awareness levels, and the last in Schwartz's five-level breakdown ...

5. Completely Unaware

No knowledge of anything except, perhaps, his own identity or opinion.

Of the customers you'll target, none is tougher to win over than the *completely* "unaware" prospect. Not only do they not know who you are, they don't know your product. They don't even know products *like* yours exist. Nor do they know they have a specific problem worth solving.

So, why bother?

Because it's here that you'll find the *completely* new markets a growing business needs. This is where you'll find new places to resell your entire product line. It's also where you might get lots of ideas for new products.

It's in this market where smart marketers make their fortunes.

Of course, it's also here that the pros compete. The secret sounds simple. Here, you'll need a lead that grabs readers without letting on the least detail of what it is you're trying to do.

To make this work, you'll need finesse.

To see how it's done, take a look at the examples in Chapters 8 and 9. In the first of these, you'll discover the Proclamation Lead. In the second, you'll read about what we call the Story Lead.

These two lead types are designed to give you an entry point for a sales message that's hard for your prospect to see coming, let alone classify.

Why? Because winning the attention of your most "unaware" customers can be especially difficult, as they have no reason to trust or even listen to your message. Come on too strong with a pitch or product mention, and you could chase them away.

On the other hand, once you've won their attention and moved past that initial resistance, their lack of awareness can make them more receptive to an offer which is, to them, unique in a very real way.

One famous example that we'll look at more closely is one you might know from *The Wall Street Journal*. It could have opened with an invitation to subscribe to the world's most famous financial journal at a discount.

It could have shown how past headlines broke stories about dangers in the markets or giant opportunities that readers might otherwise have missed.

Instead, it began ...

Dear Reader,

On a beautiful late spring afternoon, twenty-five years ago, two young men graduated from the same college.

They were very much alike, these two young men. Both had been better than average students, both were personable, and both — as young college graduates are — were filled with ambitious dreams for the future.

Recently, these men returned to their college for their 25th reunion.

They were still very much alike. Both were happily married. Both had three children. And both, it turned out, had gone to work for the same Midwestern manufacturing company after graduation, and were still there.

But, there was one difference.

One of the men was manager of a small department of that company. The other was president ...

Where, in that engaging story, is the newspaper mentioned? It's nowhere to be found. And, the subscription offer? Just as absent.

Yet, as you'll read in Chapter 9, this powerful and very indirect opening was the start of one of the most successful direct response letters of all time. So much, that the "tale of two young men" story is a much-copied and still successful model today.

But, before you move ahead for more on these and other examples, find out in the next chapter why each of our specific six lead types tends to work better in some situations where they might fail in others.

Summary: Why "Awareness" Matters

Knowing what your prospect knows in advance of a sales pitch is just as important as knowing who he is or what he wants. Advertising great Gene Schwartz broke it down into an "Awareness Scale," ranging from the "most aware" to the "least aware," as follows:



Direct or Indirect?



“That’s right — it filets, it chops, it dices and slices. It never stops. It lasts a lifetime, mows your lawn, and it picks up the kids from school ... It plays a mean rhythm. It makes excuses for lipstick on your collar. And it’s only a dollar, only a dollar, only a dollar.”

— Tom Waits

At a cocktail party, how do you start a conversation?

With an old friend, you might pick up right where you left off. With a total stranger, you might first look for ways to “break the ice.”

Socially, this insight comes naturally. What you might not realize, though, is that in marketing — and especially in crafting powerful leads for sales letters — the same instinct can apply.

For instance, take a look at this envelope:



This was for an invitation the *Cooking Club of America* sent to “serious cooks only.”

Even on the envelope, you know immediately what the letter inside is about. This is not for bachelors who can't boil eggs. Or college students with take-out shops on speed dial.

This is for “foodies” who love the kitchen, crack spines on cookbooks, and who enjoy talking and thinking about the gadgets and secrets that can make them better at their craft.

Inside, you find a letter with this offer stamped right at the top ...



Then the lead begins ...

“Dear Fellow Food Lover,

“Would you mind very much if I sent you a free cookware set to use in your kitchen? How about a free bread machine? A free selection of spices? A free set of utensils? ... ”

It goes on to explain that you can test — and keep — free kitchen gadgets every month, just by joining the *Cooking Club of America*.

The club has other benefits, too, of course — a recipe directory, equipment deals and discounts, member contests, member forums and events, a members-only magazine. But, true to the Rule of One principle discussed in Chapter 1, they focused on the one benefit that testing proved an immediate draw.

And, because they were targeting already passionate and informed cooks, the copywriter saw no need to “warm up” or educate the readers. The offer invitation alone was enough. The letter was a huge success.

Lots of sales letters take exactly this same kind of head on or “direct” approach.

You might recognize some of these famous headlines:

“Don’t Pay a Penny For This Book Until it Doubles Your Power to Learn”

“Weird New Sonic Lure Catches Fish Like Crazy ... ”

“We’re Looking For People Who Like to Draw”

“At Last, Instant Beauty!”

“FREE — The Book That Has Helped Thousands to Get Slim and Stay Slim”

But, it would be a mistake to think that direct offers are the only way to sell, or even the best way in all situations. Take this Gene Schwartz classic, which first appeared as a full-page space ad in *Barron’s*

...



Nowhere in the lead can you guess this is about a \$5.95 book. Nor does the lead focus on the six wealth-creation secrets found inside.

Schwartz realized that if he really wanted to highlight how this book differed from all the rest, he would have to find a different way to lead the reader into the sales message.

So, instead of focusing on the book or the secrets, he threw the spotlight on the reader. Not just his desire to get rich, which is common, but with the word “courage,” some deeper unspoken feelings the reader might harbor about making money.

This ad, too, was a big hit, selling thousands of copies of the book.

These other, less direct headlines just as famous as that one include:

“She Fled the Hospital When the Doctor Said ‘Cut Her Open’”

“71-Year Old Man Has Sexual Congress 5 Times a Day”

“How a ‘Fool Stunt’ Made Me a Star Salesman”

“What Never, Ever to Eat on an Airplane ... ”

“The Great Oil Hoax: What George Bush Was Told Behind Closed Doors”

In each case, the lead pulls you in with a story or a piece of news. But, claims tied directly to the product have all but disappeared. When the headline and lead take this approach of avoiding direct claims or reference to the product, we call it an “indirect” sales lead.

Which Approach is Better?

Which is better: a “direct” or “indirect” approach?

Here’s what award-winning copywriter Don Hauptman, who you might remember for the famous headline “Speak Spanish Like a Diplomat,” wrote in a memo way back in 1979:

“I have come to the conclusion that some of the strongest copy is not of the traditional hard-sell variety, with superlatives, benefits, and how-to. A more seductive, indirect, oblique approach strikes me as being the wave of the future.”

Meanwhile, equally successful copywriter and author Bob Bly says, “The majority of my heads and leads are direct, as a result of my long years in Business-to-Business ... where virtually every headline

and lead is direct.”

Then, there’s copywriter Clayton Makepeace, possibly the highest-earning U.S. copywriter. Says Clayton: “Do direct benefit headlines still work? Hell, yes! I use them all the time ... but in many markets and for many products, they’re working less well than they once did — so ‘A’-level writers have evolved other ways to seize prospects’ attention ... ”

Or, you could ask highly-successful copywriter Lee Euler his opinion about direct or indirect leads. Lee is famous for some of the most successful indirect sales letters in the financial newsletter industry — including *The Plague of the Black Debt* you’ll see highlighted in Chapter 8. Lee’s opinion:

“Pure news or curiosity, with no clear connection to the customer’s concerns, can be very dangerous ... if you have to choose, choose the [direct] benefit approach. You’re almost always better off with a headline that offers a strong benefit that addresses a deep need of the customer.”

Bill Bonner launched his own publishing empire with the indirect *International Living* classic lead shown here.

You look out your window, past your
gardener, who is busily pruning the
lemon, cherry, and fig trees...amidst the
splendor of gardenias, hibiscus, and hollyhocks.

The sky is clear blue. The sea is a deeper
blue, sparkling with sunlight.

A gentle breeze comes drifting in from the
ocean, clean and refreshing, as your maid brings
you breakfast in bed.

For a moment, you think you have died and
gone to heaven.

But this paradise is real. And affordable. In
fact, it costs only half as much to live this dream
lifestyle...as it would to stay in your own home!

Bill has his own opinion about indirect leads. “I like indirect leads because they have to appeal straight to the heart. Copy always has to aim that way, of course, but indirect copy forces you to do it. The risks are higher, but so are the rewards.”

With copywriting giants like these leaning both ways, you can guess that both “direct” and “indirect” can work extremely well. The trick is deciding which to use and when.

The Role Awareness Plays

In the last chapter, we saw how much the awareness level of your customer can vary. Your customer can be “most aware” of who you are and what you’re selling or at least of the problems you can help him solve. Or, he can be *completely* “unaware” of much of anything having to do with what you’re trying to sell him, his problems, or the solutions to them.

By far the easiest way to figure out if you should come at a sales lead idea head on or sidle up to it indirectly, is to figure out where your prospect falls on this scale of awareness.

The more aware he is, usually the more direct sales lead works best.

The less aware, the more indirect you’re going to want to go.

It's not a perfect indicator, but it's pretty close.

On the “awareness line” we showed you in Chapter 2, it might look like this:

How Aware Your Customer Is Helps Decide How Direct You Should Be



Of course, there are other ways to explain why you might want to use one kind of approach or the other. For instance, you'll hear that directly stating the benefit or getting right to your offer in the lead works best when ...

You're selling a product that's easy to understand.

You can make a promise that's very large and easily accepted.

You've got an exceptionally good deal or guarantee to offer.

Your customer knows and trusts you and deals with you often.

You've made a product improvement your market was already waiting for.

Each is a case when awareness and acceptance levels are already high. So, buyers are more receptive to the sale right away.

Here's an example of a direct lead that did very well. The product, TurboTax, is already well-known tax software.



What could be more familiar, at least to this product's target audience, than the pain of preparing and paying taxes?

This copy doesn't need to dredge up those emotions. Because the customer is already there and, most likely, on the brink of a purchase. He may even know TurboTax by name.

The relationship is already in place. So instead, this copywriter can cut right to the chase with something much more direct. He can jump right to the irresistible offer.

As you can see, writing direct ads can be easier than writing indirect ads, simply because you don't

have to work as hard to educate or seduce a prospect before you reveal that you're looking to make a sale. When you're working with a "most aware" prospect, a straightforward direct lead can be extremely powerful.

On the other hand, you'll also find times when a purely direct approach comes on too strong or makes it too easy for a target customer to assume he's not interested, even before he actually knows what you're selling.

This happens more often when ...

✘ Your customer trusts you less as a resource than you imagine.

✘ Your customer just doesn't trust the scope of your claims.

✘ Your customer doesn't believe a solution to his problem is possible.

✘ Your customer doesn't even know there's a problem worth solving.

✘ Your claims all sound too much like everybody else's.

The less your customer knows about you, what you're selling, or his own needs, the less effective a direct lead is likely to be. For instance, he might not know what sets your product apart from similar ones. He might not understand what makes you credible. Or, he might not even be aware of the problems you're promising to solve at all.

In each case, a lead that's too direct risks forcing assumptions or ignoring obstacles that will get in the way of making your sale. So, you'll want instead to close that awareness gap before you try to reveal the details of whatever you're offering.

Copywriter and publisher William Bonner, who's also a history buff, often compares this lead-writing lesson to the history of wars and military strategy.

Empires like to fight direct wars, coming on strong with full force, says Bill. And, that works a lot of the time. But, when you're outflanked and outmatched, going in headfirst can be suicide.



Some of the greatest military "upsets" in history — when the barbarians took Rome, when American revolutionaries turned back British redcoats, even when the Vietcong repelled the West — tie their victories to "end around" tactics and sneak attacks. In short, they win

by being more indirect.

Of course, nobody recommends you wage war on customers. But, you are waging war on their skepticism, along with the many demands on your customer's time, and the years of built-up resistance they might have to advertising or new ideas in general.

When you're working with a *less aware* or *skeptical* customer, the great power of an indirect lead is it can open — or re-open — the door on that relationship before the customer has the chance to get confused or sock your offer away in a pigeon-hole of “heard that, done that before.”

You might want to try one of the more indirect kinds of leads when ...

• You're writing to a customer who knows little or nothing about you.

• You're selling something that needs explanation.

• You've got a jaded customer with a lot of skepticism to overcome.

• Your product has a timely news connection too big to ignore.

• You're ready to reinvent or elevate your product or the idea behind it.

For instance, here's a promotion that successfully uses an indirect approach ...


Winter 2010 • \$7.05 **What Doctors Won't Tell You** SPECIAL BONUS ISSUE

**“I had one foot in the grave,
and the other on a banana peel.
My doctor sent me to the
nursing home to die...”**

But what happened next might be called a miracle!

“Two years ago, after seven trips to the hospital, the cardiologist gave me the news—my heart was failing. Since then, I have had a defibrillator installed and am now a resident of a nursing home.

“My condition was slowly deteriorating, and I was getting weaker, when—thank God—I got a news bulletin about your



product. With one foot in the grave and the other on a banana peel, I figured what the heck have I got to lose.

“After one week on [your capsules], no more chest pains, no more shortness of breath, no more tingling triceps.

“My doctor sent me to the nursing home to die, but I've gotten too busy to do it.” —Leslie V., Warminster, PA

Obviously, the subject here is health.

It's clear the subject here is health. But beyond that, does anything here immediately give away what kind of health product might be offered? Not quite.

Rather, the lead and headline combination promise to entertain and inform all by themselves, enough to make reading the sales piece almost irresistible to even the most skeptical or disconnected reader.

Another benefit of the indirect lead is that part of what makes it work is not just the emotional connection it makes on the spot, but the way it *actively* involves the reader in making that connection.

Direct leads deliver an idea to a customer that he's ready to accept. Indirect leads, on the other hand, give the customer extra emotional momentum and reaffirming proof to help him finish forming the

conclusions he's only just started to make. Conclusions that will, hopefully, energize his imagination enough that he'll soon be ready to buy.

This might help explain why, when an indirect lead works — and it can take a lot more work to find one that will — it can work extremely well. Because to write a good indirect lead, you have to work that much harder to get inside your prospect's head and figure him out. In some cases, you might even need to get to know him better than he knows himself.

Master Copywriter Clayton Makepeace calls what we're referring to as indirect leads as “dominant emotion” leads. Says Clayton:

“Every time I get a new control, I go to work cranking out up to six cover tests for each roll-out, each one trying a different type of lead. Sometimes, my benefit heads win. Other times, my dominant emotion leads win. Recently, I'm finding in heads-up A/B splits, dominant emotion leads are winning more often. And looking back over the 34 years I've been doing this, the fact is, most of my biggest controls (packages that mailed 20 to 30 million pieces per year) have had dominant emotion leads.”

Again, as powerful as they can be, you do have risks to consider when testing indirect leads. For instance ...

✘ You might accidentally use an indirect lead when you don't need to.

✘ You might pick a lead that's too indirect to connect back to your product.

✘ You risk being too subtle by taking your time to get to the product.

✘ You risk boring your customer by taking too long to get to the product.

✘ You risk getting distracted by writing something “interesting” but not relevant.

Many humor-based “brand advertising” ads, for instance, take such an indirect approach to selling that the prospect never figures out what's for sale. But, rarely is being clever or coy in sales copy the same as being successfully indirect.

When trying to decide whether you should try the “direct” or “indirect” approach, you should start by figuring out where your target reader falls on the Awareness Scale.

More aware and already engaged customers tend to respond better to direct leads.

Less aware or skeptical customers tend to respond better to indirect leads.

Of course, in advertising everything remains to be tested and nothing is a hard-and-fast rule. But generally speaking, that's how we've seen the chips fall.

Of course, just like there are shades of customer awareness, there are also shades of directness and indirectness. Which is why there are different types of direct and indirect leads. In this book, we've identified the six major categories of these lead types we see most often. We'll spend the rest of this book showing you how to make each of these six lead types work best for you.

Six Types of Direct and Indirect Leads

Here's a quick introduction to the lead types we'll cover:

The Offer Lead: This is a direct appeal that goes straight to deal. Offer Leads almost always mention the product, the price, discounts, premiums, guarantees, and other related “deal” elements very early in the lead, if not in the headline. An “Invitation” type of lead that opens by asking a prospect to become a

member or try a product is a more subtle variation on the classic Offer Lead.

The Promise Lead: This might be the most common type of lead that you'll see. It's only slightly less direct than the Offer Lead, in that the product usually isn't mentioned as early. But, it still opens with your product's best and biggest claim. In a classic "Promise" ad, the big promise is your headline, your first line, and often your last line, too.

The Problem-Solution Lead: This is the classic "hot button" approach, where you delay any talk of the product at first and instead lead off by identifying your prospect's biggest, most emotionally-charged, and relevant issue. Promises related to the product immediately follow.

The Big Secret Lead: The "tease" of hard-to-come-by knowledge, formula, or 'system' leads the promo. The secret can either be a solution or hidden problem or, as in many financial promos, a 'system' for getting consistently good results. Usually, you get the best mileage when ordering the product reveals the secret.

The Proclamation Lead: Decidedly *indirect*, a Proclamation Lead seeks to jar the "unaware" reader out of his seat. Maybe with a factoid that's just incredible, maybe with a shocking future forecast or prediction, or maybe with a bold statement. The goal is to disarm the prospect for just long enough to work your way back to the product and your pitch.

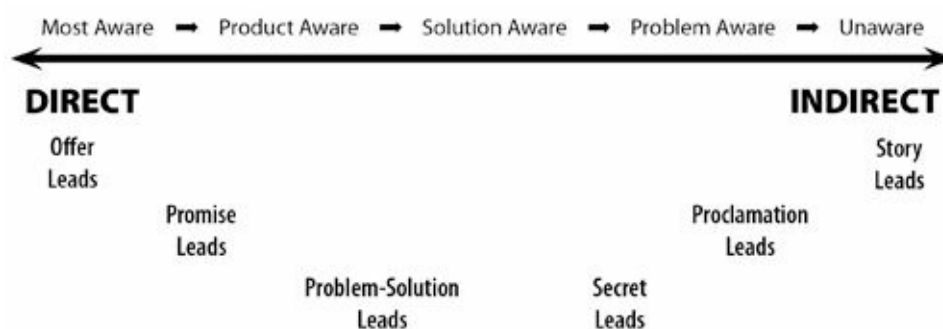
The Story Lead: This may be not only the most indirect way to open a sales letter, but also one of the most consistently powerful. Everyone loves a story. What's more, stories can engage readers who don't know you or the product well or who might flinch at a more direct, unbelievable claim. Testimonials, guru bios, historical proof, or track record — all yield Story Leads. Just make sure to tell the story quickly and keep it in context of the bigger promise/core idea of the promotion.

True to what you read in Chapter 1 about the Rule of One, all of these lead types still work best when focused on one unifying Big Idea. All of them will also need, sooner rather than later, to work their way back to big product claims and benefits. And ultimately, all need to get back to the product itself and the offer.

You'll find that some of these leads work better when you can talk to your prospect more directly. Others work best when you take a more indirect approach.

And, in some cases — Story Leads, for example — you'll find you can make the lead type work either directly *or* indirectly. It will depend on who you're writing to, what they know, and what kind of product you're writing for.

We'll show you this with specific examples in the chapters that follow. But roughly plotted on the Awareness Scale we've used so far, here's how it might break down ...



You may find sales leads that defy definition exclusively as any one of these types. Certainly of the

millions of sales letters mailed or posted online, copywriters have tried thousands of ‘new’ approaches.

But, when we studied the most memorable and imitated “Hall-of-Fame” classics and million-dollar mailings, we found they almost entirely fell into one of these six categories that we’ll define and discuss in detail in the pages ahead.

The Easiest Type of Sales Lead You'll Ever Write — Or Your Money Back



“What marketers sell is hope.”
— Seth Godin

If this first lead type we'll look at isn't the easiest you'll ever write, with the most return per ounce of effort ... we'll see to it you get back every penny you paid for this book.

Sound like a good deal? To us, it does.

Because what we've just done — promising you that the **Offer Lead** is the simplest you'll find in this book — is a safe bet. *In the right situation, an Offer Lead can practically write itself.*

In fact, here's what our old friend Gene Schwartz says ...

“Here, the copywriter is nothing more than the merchandise manager's phrasemaker. The price is the most important part of his headline. There is nothing creative about his job and he should receive the lowest possible scale of pay.”

But, hang on.

Are Offer Leads Really That Simple?

In most cases, yes — Offer Leads can be that simple.

In some cases, they can get a little more sophisticated.

To understand why, first you've got to understand what we mean by “offers” themselves. The offer is how you *close* every single sales letter you'll ever write. There is no such thing as a sales letter without an offer that lays out the details of what's for sale and what the prospect gets in return.

The difference here is usually the offer only shows up close to the end of the copy. And, the product might not get mentioned until sometime after the lead as well.

But with an Offer Lead, you're lifting the curtain on your offer right up front.

We talked about the “directness” of a sales letter. You can measure how direct a letter is by how *quickly* it gets to mentioning the product and — even more so — the details of the deal. This is what makes Offer Leads the *most direct* of all the lead types you’ll discover in this book.

This is also why Schwartz and others often think of Offer Leads as the easiest to write. Because when you’ve got a very good deal ... going out to a very receptive audience ... it can be almost *impossible* to screw up a good Offer Lead.

That said, even something as innately appealing as a good deal can be made even more effective in the hands of a good copywriter. You only need to look at some of the great Offer Leads written by Schwartz himself for examples. Take a look at this headline from an ad Schwartz wrote to sell an educational product for the *Univox Institute* ...

Guaranteed To Improve Your Child’s School Marks — *or you pay nothing!*

The Fabulous New Teaching Machine Automated Speed Learning Method

Is there any question here that you’re about to be “sold?” Not at all. We know in the first instant that it’s about a product, in this case some sort of “teaching machine.” We know that in just moments from reading these words, someone will ask us for money. And, we know, also, that it’s attached to some sort of guarantee.

Yet, despite the often-repeated cliché that nobody likes to be “sold,” this ad brought in millions of dollars from new and returning customers. No wonder Schwartz used a similar approach in an ad he wrote to sell a book called *How to Double Your Power to Learn*. His headline for this one began ...

Don’t Pay A Penny For This Book Till It Doubles Your Power to Learn!

Here at last is your chance to make such an overwhelming difference in your child’s performance in school — in as little as five short minutes of your time everyday — that the teacher may actually call you up to see what happened!

Let me explain ...

Again, the offer is instant. His first four words reveal that you’ll be asked for money — by guaranteeing you’ll get it back if you’re not satisfied — and yet, this ad went on to sell over 600,000 copies of the book.

The formula comes back again in this headline ...

“Don’t Pay One Penny Till This Course Turns You Into A Human Computer!”

And, in this one ...

“Don’t Pay One Penny Till This Course Turns Your Mind Into A Mental Magnet”

Notice the twist. In each case, the offer detail isn’t price but guarantee. And in each case, he’s also shored up the offer with a very powerful promise. *This is something you’ll see often in Offer Leads*. Take a look at a few more examples and you’ll see what we mean ...

“Give me five days and I can give you a magnetic personality ... let me prove it — free”

“You must win at least \$7,500 with my 13 points or they’re yours free”

“Free for a month ... a full head of hair in only 32 seconds a day”

“Pick the brains of a millionaire for \$10”

“Free to brides — two dollars to others”

“I guarantee (with my own money) that you will shoot your lowest score ever on your next round of golf”

As you can see, each headline leads explicitly to some kind of offer. But in each example, simply by hinting at the guarantee, these copywriters elevated the impact beyond a simple price-driven “good deal.” They’ve opened the door to make a claim, and in most of these cases, an irresistible one.

Of course, adding guarantees or promises to an Offer Lead just scratches the surface of what you can do with this type of sales letter opening. What else can you test?

You’ll see some examples in just a moment.

You’ll also notice as you read, even when we’re working with very different products and very different deals, most successful Offer Leads still share a similar formula. It goes something like this ...

Immediately focus on the most emotionally-compelling detail of your offer

Underscore the most valuable benefit of that deal

Elaborate on that same deal-benefit in the lead that follows

At some point, include a compelling “reason why” you’re offering that deal

Each of these four steps in the Offer Lead formula is important. But, we want to draw your attention here to that last part of the formula, the “reason why,” because it’s the element many copywriters overlook.

The “reason why” could be almost anything, depending on what you’re selling and the context in which you’re selling it. Maybe supplies are short. Maybe the price offer has a deadline. Maybe there’s a news event that’s coming or has already happened that makes your offer an imperative.

But, in each case, you must offer your prospect something to answer the question that’s inevitable, in response to an offer that sounds too good to be true: “Okay, that sounds great ... *but what’s the catch?*”

A good “reason why” can help diffuse that last bit of resistance. It can be a device to heighten the urgency of your offer. And, it can even be something that shows your prospect you share his concerns or agenda.

There can, in fact, be a catch attached to an Offer Lead. And if there is, you should mention it.

Either reveal it or hint at it early and make sure you explain the catch sometime before you ask for the final sale. Why?

First, because it’s better business not to try to “put one over” on your prospect. But also, because the “catch” can or should always be something that’s also a net positive for the deal.

For instance, the “catch” of a gift-driven offer might be the purchase of a valuable product that’s even better than the gift itself. Or, the “catch” might be a limit on how many customers you’ll accept, who you’ll accept, how many items you’ll sell, or how long the offer is going to last.

In each case, what’s most important in an effective Offer Lead is that the prospect feels immediately that the benefit he’s about to get is both valuable and a “steal” by comparison to what he would normally be willing to pay.

Again, that value could be connected to the quality of what you’re offering, the promise of what it will

do for the reader, or even the availability of what's on offer.

And, what makes it a “steal” might be a low price or a discount — often that's the case — but it doesn't have to be. Sometimes emphasizing a higher or more elite price is what will get you the sale. Many luxury brands charge more simply because some prospects being able to afford the higher price is part of the appeal.

The following email ad from Thompson Cigars illustrates this first kind of “value” offer and does it very simply and directly. If you're a cigar smoker, you know what they're promising you immediately: a highly-regarded brand of cigars at an uncommonly good price. And, just to make sure that point isn't missed, the copywriter does all the math to show you that this is a really good deal.

THOMPSON - 93 years of
CIGAR Savvy
The Good Life Catalog www.thompsoncigar.com Fall 2008 - \$4.00

FREE \$20 Gift Card
to Omaha Steaks with \$25 minimum purchase from this catalog.
Use promotion code from back of catalog when shopping online or by phone. Limit 1 offer per customer. Terms and conditions apply.

SAVE 59%

COHIBA \$29
Lonsdale Grande 5-pack **COMPARE AT \$69⁹⁵**

92 Years of Excellence

Featuring an all-Dominican long filler blend of Cuban-seed Piloto Cubano and Otto topped off with a genuine African Cameroon wrapper, the Cohiba is one fine cigar. Here's a chance to experience a cigar brand that has been rated #2 by Cigar Insider. *Heard Cohiba Lonsdale Grande 20 1-1/4" x 47-3/4" 5pk \$29 (Limit 1 per customer)*

Shop hundreds of offers online at www.thompsoncigar.com
Take 3 Months to Pay on orders over \$100 with 0% interest
NEW Cigar Auction Site Search, Bid... **WIN** amazing cigars, incredible bargains everyday
<http://auction.thompsoncigar.com>

WMN-01

And, here's the twist that makes this ad different from all the other cigar ads. To sweeten the deal, the copy also throws in a \$20 Gift Card for Omaha Steaks. This is what you call a “dissolving bonus” — a gift that adds so much extra value, it melts away remaining resistance. No doubt a good steak likely holds plenty of appeal for your typical stogie-smoker.

Here is another example of a clear, direct Offer Lead from Littleton Coin:

SAVE 67%

FREE Gift!
When you order within 30 days
Complete 4-Coin Uncirculated Set of 2009
pennies, featuring special designs honoring
the bicentennial of Lincoln's birth!

45 Day Money Back Guarantee of Satisfaction
If you are not completely satisfied with your purchase, please return the coins within 45 days for a full refund.

YES! Please send me the Complete Uncirculated 56-Coin
Set of 1999-2009 Statehood, D.C. & U.S. Territories
Quarters for \$199.95 - regular \$299.95 - plus free shipping.
Just 3 coins plus my \$45.00 discount = \$154.95!
Set of 56 coins, including 4 Lincoln pennies, \$154.95.

QUICK! MUST BE RECEIVED WITHIN 30 DAYS

Name (Please Print): _____
Address (Please Print): _____
City (Please Print): _____ State (Please Print): _____ Zip (Please Print): _____
Phone (Please Print): _____
E-mail (Please Print): _____
Day () Night ()
Method of payment: ☐ Cash ☐ Check ☐ Credit Card ☐ American Express ☐ Discover Network
Card # _____ Exp. Date _____
Cardholder Name _____
Signature _____
Total Amount \$ _____
Shipping & Handling \$ **FREE!**

Send 1 dollar. Please include coins with \$1.00 bill. No need to return coins.
Number please send coins to: 10101 W. 10th Ave., Suite 100, Denver, CO 80202

Like the cigar ad, the offer is instant and explicit. The prospect is told exactly what he'll get (all 56 commemorative quarters). His savings are made clear (67%) and he's also teased with a "free gift" — or resistance-resolving bonus — of 4 uncirculated Lincoln pennies.

Are all Offer Leads this explicit? Not necessarily. Consider, for example, a special sub-type of Offer Lead called the "Invitation" offer. Invitations work especially well when you have something that's anticipated or exclusive on offer. Take a look at this next example, from an investing and wealth protection society called *The Oxford Club* ...

This document is important and requires your immediate attention. Our offer of membership in The Oxford Club is risk free: if during your first 30 days you decide membership is not for you, just let us know and you'll get a full refund for every cent you paid. No questions asked. Everything you have received is yours to keep. Please take a moment to read this disclosure and then R.S.V.P. by mail, fax or calling membership services at 1-877-653-9118.

Offer of Membership

BY INVITATION ONLY • R.S.V.P.

- YOU ARE CORDIALLY INVITED to learn more about the "World's Premier Wealth-Building Organization" as our guest — risk free for THIRTY (30) days — and enjoy full, and unrestricted, "Premiere Level" membership privileges.
- OUR PRIMARY SKILL is showing you how to *double* your net worth with exceptionally *low risk*. As of NOVEMBER 1, 2006 we have a success rate of 97% (recommendations published in our twice-monthly *Communiqué*).
- OUR CHAIRMAN'S LETTER OF DISCLOSURE below, reveals our investment strategy and current trading portfolio, describes your membership privileges, and explains why we believe our biggest gains lie just ahead:

Dear New Member-Elect:

Pity the poor newsletter subscriber. All those promises.
All those dreams of glory.

Yet how seldom the puffery pans out.

The reason is simple: You're never allowed to see the whole picture, the entire track record.

Instead you're offered a few cherry-picked examples, accompanied by pie-in-the-sky projections.

Discerning readers aren't interested in empty promises like these. They want bottom-line results, the kind that ...

(over, please)

Immediately, you notice that it's much less forthcoming about the details of the deal. But, because it looks and feels like an invitation, there's no question for the prospect that some tempting carrot is about to be dangled.

When explaining how this special kind of “exclusivity” offer works, we like the example of a high-end restaurant or big city nightclub. If you've ever taken a ride through Manhattan or Miami after hours, you don't have to travel far to see clubs with the aspiring “in” crowd lined up for entry.

Almost invariably in front of these clubs, you see a bouncer or that icon of exclusivity, the ominous red “Velvet Rope.” Nobody gets past the rope without a nod from the gatekeeper.

But, as much as that rope keeps people out, it also draws people in. Something, they reason, must be really great on the other side of that door.

Invitation offers often capitalize on that deep desire to feel included. Of course, they're only valid when what you're offering really does hold some kind of exclusive value. Not every product does. Products with a long tradition of quality, clubs and societies, and luxury items, can work especially well with an invitation-style pitch.

When Should You Use an Offer Lead?

Of course, not every product works every time with an Offer Lead either.

To help you decide, follow the guideline we set earlier: *More aware* customers often respond to direct leads and *less aware* customers often respond better to indirect leads.

Since the Offer Lead is the most direct lead type you'll come across, you will mostly want to use it for products that are easy to explain and for prospects who already know something about you, about what you're selling, and even about the market value of what's for sale.

Why? Because your “most aware” customers are those whose trust you've already won. Or, at least, they are those that already know very well what they want. And, if you're offering it, they're the ones who are already prepared to buy. They are *emotionally open* to hearing what you have for sale.

In that kind of situation, that's why seasoned copywriters and marketers agree that it's *pretty tough* to screw up an Offer Lead. In fact, the more aware and open the customer, the simpler that up-front offer can usually be.

We say “usually” because there's a special caveat. Occasionally, you can run into situations where a high-level awareness is a net negative. For instance, think of someone on a car lot or the other end of a phone conversation with an insurance salesman.

In those examples, awareness levels might be very high. So might the need for the product and even the desire to buy. But so, too, might be the level of skepticism, thanks to too many similar offers and too many broken sales promises.

In that case, a simple Offer Lead is suicide. Instead, you'll need to move more toward the indirect side of the scale, so you can buy the time to build up trust levels all over again.

What to Test in Offer Leads

What's the best detail to test in an Offer Lead?

“Most aware” prospects will respond just fine if you lead with something about the price — a

discount, a last-chance deal before a price hike, a countdown price deal.

Slightly less aware prospects, even though they're almost ready to be sold, might need a little extra to get them over that hump of indecision. For instance, a free or almost-free trial offer, extra gift premiums, or an extra-strong guarantee.

When you're looking for ideas, just keep this in mind: *Anything you can test in a regular offer at the end of a sales letter, you can test in an Offer Lead.*

There's something else special about Offer Leads.

You've seen that this lead type often blends not just the offer detail but also a promise in the headline. In most cases, you'll find blending two or more lead types violates the Rule of One principle we covered in Chapter 1.

But, for a handful of lead types — *Offer Leads and Promise Leads especially* — you can combine with other lead types to get an even stronger impact. This is because elements like offers and promises are indispensable in every kind of package. So, rather than adding what isn't there, you're simply bringing it forward.

Here's a famous example from *The Economist* ...

May I send you 3 FREE Issues of what may be the most influential (as well as selectively distributed) newsweekly in the world?

Dear Colleague,

Every Monday morning, a rather unusual publication arrives at the desks of a select circle of individuals in positions of power and influence.

The readers of this discreetly (one is almost tempted to say reluctantly) publicized newsweekly include presidents (of countries, banks, universities, and Fortune 500 companies), ranking executives (in business, government, and industry) and prominent thinkers (in law, science, economics, and military strategy).

Now, it may not surprise you to learn that the average personal income of North American subscribers to this singular periodical exceeds \$144,800 per annum. However, it may surprise you to discover that despite the enormous clout and affluence of its world renowned readers ... only a relative handful of Americans are aware of the existence of this exclusive publication, much less the intelligence it provides.

But now, with this letter, you are cordially invited to join the extremely select circle of men and women who wouldn't think of beginning each business week without the incomparable insight of and reporting of ... The Economist.

Enclosed you will find a non-transferable order card. Return it to me and I will send you three absorbing issues of The Economist to read at my expense. These three issues will be yours to keep free whether or not you decide to become a subscriber ...

Again you see it's an offer right away.

It slaps down those details in the headline.

Then, it continues by stressing how exclusive their "club" of subscribers happens to be, a hallmark of the special "Invitation" type of Offer Lead we talked about earlier.

Would opening with an offer have worked here without the recognition and credibility *The Economist* has spent years building ahead of this? Probably not.

How likely is it that this letter landed in the hands of the "relative handful of Americans who are aware of the existence of this exclusive publication ... ?" Very.

Otherwise, the three-free issue offer might have gone over like free ice cream in winter.

Here's one more.

Dear Sir,

This letter is going to be short and to the point. We don't want to make a big thing of it. Not yet anyway.

We'd like to invite you to take advantage of what we call our "no-strings" membership.

This offer extends our typically generous introduction to you: choose any 4 books for \$1 each.

But it omits the usual obligation to buy four more books. You don't even have to buy one more book.

In other words, you can join Book-of-the-Month Club, take your welcoming package of 4 books (saving up to \$100 or more), and never buy another thing from us.

It's an experiment for us. Will this attract the kind of reader who will appreciate our other Club benefits as well as the introductory offer?

It's an experiment for you. A way to try us without tying yourself down to a commitment.

So enjoy all the Club benefits you wish. Just as if you were a committed member. We've put it all in writing. Take any books for \$1 each, plus shipping and handling, with no obligation to buy anything else.

The rest is up to you.

I can't imagine a bigger bargain for the reader. Can you?

Sincerely,

James Mercer,

President

P.S. This offer isn't available to everyone. It isn't transferable. But, if you decide to join and become a member of the Club, we can understand why you might want to share the news of your "no-strings" membership with a special friend or two. In that event, ask them to write me and mention your name.

This "Book-of-the-Month Club" mailing was a huge success. The only other elements in the envelope were a folded lift note and a reply card. Yet, this promotion was so successful, it is one of the many offer-driven pieces collected and featured by Dennison Hatch in his book, *"Million Dollar Mailings ..."*

What Else Do You Need to Know About Offer Leads?

Most of what you need to know about writing Offer Leads, you already understand if you know how to write regular offers because both share a lot of the same tricks and techniques.

Here's a quick rundown, though, of some key ideas ...

Endorsements can give a big boost. Remember, an offer-based pitch is something you use with your “most aware” customers — that is, they trust you to cut to the details of the deal because they already know what they feel they need to know about you. Your name means something to them. In that sense, if you know you're sending something to a list that's already warm to you or some person connected with you ... use that to your advantage. That might mean making the signature under the sales letter come from the person they know and trust most. It could mean showing the face of that most-trusted person next to the headline. It might even mean putting that person's name in the product title.

Know your goal. Offer Leads that give away irresistible “FREE” gifts will get subscribers who sign up just for the gift. That might be fine for a low-priced product, where they still might stick around for more. But, it might not be so fine for a high-priced product, where the incentive to cancel and keep the premium is greater. If you need cash now, an easy-payment offer might not be something you'll want to test. But, if you want lots of new orders, this might be just the ticket. What you want out of your target audience can change what deal detail you feature up front in your Offer Lead.

Mirror and Test. The offer that's usually at the end of a sales letter and the Offer Lead you'll put up front share details, but you'll also want them to share similar language, hit the same hot buttons, and share rationale behind the special deal. Likewise, just like you would test different details in the close of a sales letter, you can test those same details in your Offer Lead.

If you can, stay short. One of the key reasons you go to a direct Offer Lead is because the customer you're writing to is already mostly sold on you or whatever you're offering. This means you can often cut a lot of the warm-up and copy-coddling that happens in less direct sales pieces. Most of what you'll write in a sales package with an Offer Lead, outside of what the deal is and how to take advantage of it, is proof that the offer has value.

When in doubt, do the math. If you're leading with a special price break, some kind of guaranteed result, or anything you can express as a percentage ... try doing the math for your reader. If your Offer Lead compares your product cost to someone else's, show the savings in terms of a dollar amount. Often, that math is aimed at showing you're about to give more to the reader than you'll expect to get in exchange.

Find clever ways to price. Offer Leads often focus on price, but not always on a simple discount or “FREE” trial deal. For instance, say you've got a half-off discount to use in your lead. It might work better if you keep the nominal price high but give them a “2-for-1” deal. Or, you could try a trade-in offer or say you'll cover the entire cost of shipping. Try introductory or limited-time pricing. Or, you might even want to try a “\$1 trial offer,” where you get their credit card information with a nominal \$1 charge and then say something like, “If after a 30-day trial, you like our widgets, you don't need to do anything. We'll just debit you for the full amount ... ”

Test time limits. Ready-to-order customers can feel even more ready to buy if they know the special deal you're offering won't last forever. Try testing a countdown deadline of either time or quantity in your Offer Lead. If your sales letter is online, set up a live “countdown” timer that shows how much (or how little) time is left on the deal.

Make it easy. Just like you would never want a prospect to get confused over how to fill out your order form or whom to call to get started, a good Offer Lead hits the reader with at least a short sentence or paragraph that hints at how easy it will be to take advantage of the deal (e.g., “And this is easy to do — just take the ‘Send-no-money Invitation’ card you’ll find in the envelope, fill it out telling me which gifts you’d like and where to send your first issue, and drop it in the postage-prepaid envelope I’ve provided. It’s that simple. But, you’ll want to make sure you do this quickly. And, here’s why ... ”).

Provide a parachute. Even though you’ll most often use Offer Leads with “already sold” buyers who have at least a partial if not full emotional commitment to your deal, you’ll still have a better chance of getting them to respond if you can reverse some or all of the risk early in the lead. Possibly even in the headline. (e.g., “Don’t pay a penny until this book ... ” or “You risk nothing unless this new strategy ... ” and so on). The Offer Leads that do this aggressively — where you pay later for a free trial now, are called “soft offers.”

Test highlighting the guarantee. We recently saw a “No Matter What” warranty on a site selling Eagle Creek luggage. “If your luggage is ever damaged (even by the airlines) we’ll repair or replace it free — no matter what.” That’s bold. And, to someone already searching for luggage, it could be a clincher that makes the sale. If you’re in a situation where an Offer Lead might work, and you’ve got a great guarantee, consider pulling it up front to feature in the headline.

A Warning about “FREE”

Featuring something “FREE” is common in Offer Leads, but it might not always be the best or strongest way for you to go. Why?

When your gift or set of giveaways feels almost as valuable as the product you’re selling, it’s rarely a problem.

Prospects are likely to sign on for the bonuses, but they’re also likely to stick around and try what they’ve paid for, too, because they can rationalize that they’ve gotten their money’s worth already.

However, when you’re selling something with a much higher perceived value, throwing in lots of freebies can actually work against you. Why?

Because it can make the paid product you’re offering look like it’s not worth as much as you claim it is.

“FREE” is a powerful word. But like jokes, funny ties, and wine — context is everything when it comes to deciding whether it’s something worth featuring in your deal.

Double Your Sales With This Next Kind of Lead



“Be neither too remote nor too familiar.”

— Prince Charles

“Cash If You Die, Cash If You Don’t”

According to our friend Drayton Bird — who has written copy for Ford, American Express, and Proctor & Gamble — that headline was one of the most successful ever written in the insurance industry.

And, we believe it.

“Your safest opening,” says Drayton, “... is your prime benefit and offer ... an instant statement, instantly comprehensible.” Despite a career going back to 1957, Drayton’s not the first to say so.

For instance, in 1904, a Canadian Mounted Policeman named John E. Kennedy marched into the office of Albert Lasker, a young partner in one of Chicago's biggest ad agencies, and told him more or less the same thing.

Their meeting started at six o'clock in the evening and they talked about nothing but this ad technique until 3 a.m. Kennedy had spent long, snowy nights studying ads and had come up with a theory he called "Reason-Why Advertising."

To find the real reason why customers buy was to find the emotional core of the promise your ad needed to make. Said Kennedy in a book by the same title, “To strike the responsive chord with the reader ... is to multiply the selling power of every reason-why given.”

Up until then, most ads appeared in newspapers and were written as news. Products were announced. They were explained. But, Kennedy and Lasker began to change all that.

They first tested their promise-driven “reason-why” ads with a washer company. Within four months, the ads were so successful, the company increased its budget with Lasker’s advertising agency from \$15,000 per year to \$30,000 — *per month*.

Kennedy went on to earn the highest salary paid to any copywriter in the industry. And, Lasker went on to build what would be the world's most successful ad agency at the time.

If you’ve ever eaten a bowl of Quaker Puffed Rice, washed your dishes with Palmolive, brushed your teeth with Pepsodent, or taken a ride in an Oldsmobile, you’ve seen success built with the help of promise-driven advertising.

Ad giant David Ogilvy went on to say, nearly 80 years later, that with the help of this one technique, “Albert Lasker made more money than anyone in the history of the advertising business.” With Kennedy’s inspiration and his own version of the Promise Lead, Lasker went on to be called “the father of modern advertising.”

When you consider the trillions of dollars Lasker’s title represents, that’s not a small feat. It’s no wonder Ogilvy himself took pains to teach the same technique in an ad he wrote for prospective ad agency clients:

How to create advertising that sells

by David Ogilvy

Ogilvy & Mather has created over \$2,000,000,000 worth of advertising, and spent \$4,000,000 tracking the results.

Here, with all the digressions of brevity, are 38 of the things we have learned.

1. The most important decision. We have learned that the effect of your advertising on your sales depends more on the decision than on the offer. This should be your primary goal.

2. Should you produce a new product? It is a difficult decision. It is a product which gives the world a new idea. It is a product which gives the world a new idea. It is a product which gives the world a new idea.

3. Long-term. The most important decision is to decide whether to produce a new product or to produce a new product. It is a decision which gives the world a new idea. It is a decision which gives the world a new idea. It is a decision which gives the world a new idea.

4. Brand image. Every advertisement should reflect the image which is the brand image. It is a decision which gives the world a new idea. It is a decision which gives the world a new idea. It is a decision which gives the world a new idea.

5. Big idea. The most important decision is to decide whether to produce a new product or to produce a new product. It is a decision which gives the world a new idea. It is a decision which gives the world a new idea. It is a decision which gives the world a new idea.

6. Don't be a slave. Nobody was ever known to be a slave. It is a decision which gives the world a new idea. It is a decision which gives the world a new idea. It is a decision which gives the world a new idea.

7. Research. The most important decision is to decide whether to produce a new product or to produce a new product. It is a decision which gives the world a new idea. It is a decision which gives the world a new idea. It is a decision which gives the world a new idea.

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Ogilvy & Mather

100 Madison Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017

The headline, “How to Create Advertising That Sells” was itself a tempting, straightforward promise for Ogilvy & Mather’s future clients. But, the lead puts it just as plain with this powerful nugget:

“It pays to promise a benefit which is unique and competitive, and the product must deliver the benefit you promise. Most advertising promises nothing. It is doomed to fail in the marketplace ... Headlines that promise to benefit sell more than those that don’t.”

Our friend and fellow copywriter, Clayton Makepeace, put it even more bluntly in a recent message to readers of his Total Package blog:

“The only reason any rational human being ever purchases anything is to derive a benefit from it! That means ... any scrap of sales copy that fails to clearly, dramatically, emphatically, credibly, and repeatedly present the benefits a product will deliver is destined to fail miserably.”

In other words, if you have any hope of getting your reader by the lapels and making him listen to your message, you first have to give him a reason why. And, that reason is bound up in a promise he cannot

resist.

These days, you won't find many ads of any type — at least not successful ones — that lack a promise of some kind, either stated outright or implied. And, almost always right there in the lead or, just as often, in the headline.

That includes every one of the six types of sales copy leads in this book. So why, you might ask, use a chapter to single out **Promise Leads** for special focus?

When Pure Promise Leads Work Best

Because, as often as there are times when a prospect needs a more subtle approach, there are also times when a simple, direct promise really is best. And again, you'll find it's always tied up with how “aware” and ready your customer is to hear about what you're selling.

This can be easy to test. Since almost every kind of lead type will include some kind of promise, often all you need to do is remove the extra elements to unearth the pure promise hidden underneath.

Take, for instance, a hypothetical offer headline for a tooth-whitening product, as you might have expected to see in our previous chapter. It might read:

A Hollywood smile in 3 days ... or your money back

The promise is clear. Use this product and flashbulbs will soon glint off your pearly whites. By adding the offer line “... or your money back,” however, this becomes a clear sales pitch. An offer. The lead that follows will quickly get to the heart of the deal and the credibility bound up in that guarantee.

No doubt, if you're already out there looking for a good deal on exactly this kind of product, an ad that starts off with that kind of bang would likely get your attention.

But, suppose you're talking to someone who's interested, but not quite sure yet that the product can deliver. For this kind of prospect, the promise is tempting. Yet, revealing the offer out of the gate might come on too strong.

In that case, it may need to be that you'll want to develop anticipation with just the promise first. You might even do it without mentioning the product at all ...

A Hollywood smile in 3 days

A lead that would follow just the pure promise alone could sound very different from the lead following an offer headline. How so? Instead of talking up the deal, it might repeat the promise another way or dive into proof.

You've seen them on the red carpet, I'm sure — the tuxes and gowns, the makeup and jewelry — but what do they all have in common? Yep.

Pearly, shining smiles full of straight, white teeth.

Now you can get the same flashy grin, and you don't need \$50,000 worth of caps and a high-ticket Hollywood dentist to make it happen.

This wasn't even possible, just a year ago.

But, it is now.

Let me show you why ...

Of course, opening with a pure Promise Lead like this one has gotten a little harder recently. The reasons for this are almost directly tied to the Promise Lead's unique success in the past. In short, more and more prospects today have become "hyper-aware."

That is, they've been hit so often with so many similar promises from a flood of so many similar products — thanks to the Internet and other always-on sources of advertising — that prospects have gone the other way and shut down to many promises.

As much as they still want their needs met by the products they buy, they have more walls raised against marketing messages. And, the one that's become most familiar to those "hyper-aware" prospects is an ad that busts into the room making a big claim or promise.

Still, you have at least two key reasons to master the Promise Lead.

First, because you need to identify and write strong promises to create *any other* kind of successful lead. And second, because there are times when a simple, direct, pure Promise Lead opening will not only work, but will prove the single best way for a marketer to get his foot in the door.

The decision is almost this simple: Promise Leads work best with "mostly aware" prospects who are almost ready to buy.

What to Promise

"Advertising works best," says Drayton Bird again, "if you promise people something they want, not — as many imagine — if you are clever, original, or shocking."

It's not hard to see that the core promise in any ad is like a statement of intention. If I read this, says your reader, what do I get in return? You, in your promise-driven copy, answer that question. But, it's also clear they'll only stick around if they like your answer.

So, what's the most *relevant promise* you can make to your prospect?

We know ads can and have promised all kinds of things: To make you thin or bulk you up. To make you stronger, younger, fitter, and faster. To teach you to do something you've always wanted to do. Or, to make something easier than you ever thought it could be. Be more attractive. Be rich. Save money. Drive a better car, own a bigger house, look more beautiful or more handsome, dress sharp, have a happy marriage.

Here are just a couple of headlines from classic Promise ads ...

Instant Relaxation!

Build Your Memory In 4 Short Weeks —

So Powerfully Your Family Won't Believe It

What made these ads work, when they did?

It's easy to guess the products these could sell. But, when a lead starts this way, it's not the promise derived from the product that's done the selling. Instead, it's the emotional promise you can see barely

hidden behind the words.

For instance, “Instant Relaxation!” promised more than just peace and quiet. It was a reward that acknowledged a well-earned rest. And, the promise of a “powerful memory” gets elevated to the respect, love, and admiration you’ll get for having such an impressive skill.

The richer part of the promises you'll make is the part that pulls the strings from behind the curtain. Friendship and status among your peers. Confidence and freedom from worry. Inclusion. Safety and security. Even just the feeling of association to people you admire and respect.

The bottom line is that the most effective part of Promise Leads — and, in fact, the promises you’ll use in all six of the lead types in this book — is that what your product will *do* for customers is only as important, or maybe less so, as how you’ll make them *feel* about themselves while using it. Or, even more importantly, how they’ll be seen by others while using it.

You'll recognize the headline of this following ad:

[illegible]

This, of course, is the same title used on one of the most successful self-help books ever sold. And, this was the ad that sold it, much better than anyone imagined possible.

The original publisher had printed only 5,000 copies for the first run.

The author, after all, was only an ex-farm-boy salesman named Dale Carnegie, who had hawked everything from bacon and soap to Packard cars, before moving to New York to become — of all things — an actor. He only started teaching his course after the acting career failed to pan out. And, it took Carnegie 15 years of compiled class notes to pull his textbook together.

Yet, it caught on with readers.

And, when a copy landed on the desk of copywriting legend Victor Schwab, he was smart enough to know that the best promise he could use to sell it was the one already on the book's cover, "*How to Win Friends and Influence People*."

Underneath the headline, Schwab's Promise Lead began ...

John D. Rockefeller, Sr., some years ago said: "The ability to deal with people is as purchasable a commodity as sugar or coffee. And, I will pay more for that ability than for any other under the sun."

Wouldn't you suppose that every college in the land would conduct practical, common sense courses to develop this "highest-priced ability under the sun?"

To our knowledge, none did.

How to develop that ability is the subject of Dale Carnegie's amazing new book ...

For extra punch, Schwab included some promise-laden chapter titles, straight out of the original book. Some of those titles read like textbook Promise headlines, for example:

Six Ways to Make People Like You Instantly

Do This and You'll be Welcome Anywhere

A Simple Way to Make a Good First Impression

Twelve Ways to Win People to Your Way of Thinking

How to Interest People

How to Get Cooperation

An Easy Way to Become a Good Conversationalist

Letters that Produce Miraculous Results

How to Spur Men on to Success

Any one of these might have worked as the main headline for the ad. And, some were tested. Over the years that followed, Schwab's ad and others went on to sell over 15 million copies.

Where Good Promise Leads Get Started

When writing a Promise Lead, where should you start?

The default for most marketers is to study the product and just figure out what it does best. After all, we've all heard the lesson about "features" versus "benefits." First, you make a list of the product's best features, then you translate those into what they will do for the customer.

Simple.

This is a lesson you may have heard connected with one of the most successful product pitches in history. Forrest E. Mars grew up in a candymaker's house. And, with some big shoes to fill. His father's home business grew to invent and sell some of the world's most famous candy bars including *Snickers*, *Mars Bars*, and *Milky Way*.

But, Forrest's father didn't want to expand the business and Forrest, fresh home from Yale University, did. So, he sold his share in the business back to Dad and moved to Europe. That's where he took up with other candymakers.

It's also where he first spotted the breakthrough that would help change the chocolate business, the

course of World War II, and millions of kids' birthday parties — and indirectly, the advertising industry.

It was a tiny pellet of chocolate, wrapped in a candy shell, found in the field kits of soldiers fighting the Spanish Civil War. The chocolate gave them quick energy, the shell kept it from melting under harsh conditions.

We know it now, of course, as the *M&M*.

Forrest took it back to the States and patented his own formula for the candy in 1941. Within a year, the U.S. was committed to World War II. And not long after, M&Ms made their way into soldiers' field rations. When the soldiers came home, the candies were a hit with the general public.

But, sales were about to get even bigger.

Forrest realized that television — making its way into the mainstream at that time — was the next place he wanted to go to sell M&Ms. He hired a copywriter named Rosser Reeves to do it. It turned out to be another groundbreaking move.

Reeves was already a success at the time. He was both copy chief and vice president of his agency in New York. But, when he sat down with Forrest Mars to talk candy, he listened and took notes like a first-year copywriter.

“He was the one who said it,” claimed Reeves in the version we've heard told. “He told me the whole history and then I pressed him and he said, ‘Well, the thing is, they only melt in your mouth, but they don't melt in your hands.’”

That was all Reeves needed.

Within four years, Mars was selling one million pounds of M&Ms per week. M&Ms have since gone on Space Shuttle flights with astronauts. They've been the official candy of the Olympics. And, according to *Business Week*, they're the bestselling candy in the world.

Mars died at age 95 in 1999, with a \$4 billion fortune. And, his candy company takes in over \$20 billion per year with 30,000 employees worldwide.

It's no accident that Reeves went on to his own kind of fame. And, not just because Reeves happens to be the real-life model for the character of Don Draper on the TV series *Mad Men*.

You might know him even better, after all, as the father of what every copy cub and professional advertiser memorizes as the “Unique Selling Proposition” or “USP.”

To Find the Promise, Find the USP

When Reeves first wrote about the USP in his book *Reality in Advertising*, he was writing down the formula you can use to write any effective Promise Lead.

Reeves' formula had three parts.

The first part for Reeves meant starting with the product. But, only if that product was actually good enough to almost sell itself. As a preacher's son, Reeves was fundamentally honest and felt all advertising should be, too. The product must be able to do what you'll say it can do.

But, an even better reason for starting with the product is the second part of Reeves' formula. What the product does, and by default will claim to do, *has to be original*. That is, the best products do something the competitor's won't or can't. That's key because the USP — the promise you'll make — has to sound and feel different from everything your prospect has heard before, too.

Then, there's the final part of Reeves' formula. This is the one most forgotten, but it's impossible to overlook if you've got any hope of coming up with a powerful promise. Every promise must target your prospect's core desire. That is, they have to already want what you're promising.

This is worth repeating.

Reeves believed, and so did Eugene Schwartz, and so do we, that you cannot *create* desire in a customer. You can only awaken what's already there. This is especially true in a pure Promise Lead, where you have nothing but the claim pulling all the weight. The more tightly you can target those core desires, the more likely your ad will work.

It's that simple.

Can a Claim Be Too Big?

We're sure you've heard British writer Samuel Johnson's advice, who famously said, "Promise, large promise, is the soul of advertisement."

And, when Johnson and his friends were about to auction off a brewery, he went on to warn them, "We are not here to sell off a parcel of vats and boilers; but to offer the potentiality of wealth beyond the dreams of avarice."

A good promise, in other words, is a big one.

And, Promise Leads should promise to change lives.

But, is that always true? No, not necessarily. Because you can run a few risks by committing to bigger and bigger advertising promises. One risk, even Johnson went on to write about, saying "Advertisements are now so numerous that they are very negligently perused, and it has therefore become necessary to gain attention by magnificence of promises, and by eloquence sometimes sublime and sometimes pathetic."

That was in 1759.

Imagine what he would say today.

A second risk is that oversized promises, especially in today's crowded market, can be so large that they become unbelievable. As copywriter Clayton Makepeace recently warned:

"Simply shout[ing] benefits are not working as well as they used to, because yours is the gazillionth 'benefit' head your prospect has seen today ... your benefit [lead] screams, 'I WANT TO SELL YOU SOMETHING!' ... [and] increasingly skeptical prospects think, 'Yeah, RIGHT!'"

Of course, you still need some kind of claim to sell. Which is why even the most *indirect* lead types you'll find in this book still lead up to a promise of some kind.

So, what to do when a promise seems too large?

One way to derail the skeptics is to just acknowledge the reason for their skepticism before they have a chance to. For instance, by turning the giant claim into a question:

Can You Really Grow \$500 Into \$8.4 Million?

The risk, of course, is that you still can't deliver on a promise that large. Or, that you'll disappoint the prospect when they realize it was just a hook to get him reading.

Another option, obviously, is to scale back to a promise until it's surprisingly small. For instance, we remember a great and simple Promise Lead that did just that, in the midst of a sea of cliché "Get Rich Quick" ads. The headline read:

Get Rich Slow

Who on earth wants to get rich “slow?” Maybe nobody. But, you can see how it still promises something desirable while actually fitting neatly into the prospect’s comfort zone.

Here’s another interesting example of a scaled-down promise working better than a big one, from career copywriter Dick Paetzke.

It seems that *Sears* had hired a team to help them sell their “Diehard” car battery on TV. To show how the battery could hold up in rough weather, the team lined up 10 cars in front of TV cameras on a cold icy night.

They shut off all the engines, linked all 10 cars to one Diehard battery, and then had 10 drivers start all the cars up at the same time. It was an amazing performance from a great product. But, there was one problem: Viewers didn’t believe it.

The team shot the commercial again, but with only three or four cars. Everything else in the demonstration was the same. This time the commercial was a smash hit. By scaling the promise back just enough, the claim was suddenly believable.

How do you know how to make a promise that’s just right?

First, you have to know what’s been promised before. That’s your mark to beat. You also have to know what your prospect expects, so you don’t *under*-promise.

You need to make promises you know you can prove. All copywriting claims, but Promise Leads especially, demand airtight credibility. That can be testimonials or anecdotes, clear metaphors, case studies, charts, and powerful statistics. Whatever it takes to make even your biggest claim a clear possibility.

And finally, you need to know how much what you’re selling can meet or beat those expectations, too. Promise Leads that over-sell a product — even successfully — only set that product up to fail faster, once it under-delivers.

The Bottom Line

When you’re targeting an eager and ready-to-buy customer, try an Offer Lead. When you’re selling to someone farther removed, or to a skeptic, try one of the other leads you’ll find in here. The more distant, the later you should look in these pages.

But, when you’re targeting a prospect that’s just barely sitting on the fence, almost ready to buy but just waiting for that extra nudge, a simple, direct Promise Lead can be an excellent tool.

What’s more, make no mistake, no matter which approach you take, Johnson was right: Promises are the soul of good ads. Make strong ones, where you can.

Just remember, far more important than the size of the promise in your lead is how *original* and *relevant* it is to your target customer.

The promises that work best are the promises that your prospect doesn’t hear anybody else making ... at a time when he really wished someone would.

Of course, that means doing more research and staying on top of the competition. It means finding new ways to say simple things. And, it means knowing your prospect’s secret desires, maybe better than he knows them himself.

But, it's the only way.

Promise Leads ...

- Should start with the product's biggest benefit.
 - Should hit the targeted promise right away.
 - Must connect the core benefit to the prospect's core desire.
 - Should sound as new and original as possible.
 - Should be bold but still believable.
 - Must follow with even bigger proof.
 - Often focus on speed, size, or quality of results.
 - Usually won't work to skeptics or highly "unaware" prospects
 - Can work very well with "on the fence" prospects.
-

Still Can't Find Your Hook? Try This Time-Tested Solution



“When you advertise fire-extinguishers, open with the fire.”
— David Ogilvy

What keeps your customer up at night?

In countless seminars and training sessions with new copywriters, it’s a question we’ve both repeated often. And, one we hope you’ve answered, too, no matter what it is you’re hoping to sell.

Because once you identify that one big worry, you could have the makings of a blockbuster pitch in the form of this next lead type, the **Problem-Solution Lead**.

This lead type is a “go-to” classic when it comes to starting sales copy. You’ll find plenty of examples in ad archives from every era, including plenty included in this chapter.

You can also find lots of Problem-Solution Leads in an industry where we’ve both done a lot of consulting — financial publishing.

When we’ve asked that question in the financial publishing business, our prospects shared a similar profile. Most are men in their mid-50s to 60s with some money to invest. Some have set aside a lot already; some, not so much.

But, even in their differences, their worries are often similar.

In the big picture, they often worry about the mess politicians have made of the economy. They worry about countries fighting over oil, gas, food, and other resources. And, they worry about market scandals and corruption that might cheat them out of savings.

More locally, they worry about keeping up with bills in retirement after paychecks stop rolling in. They worry about shrinking bank accounts and the impact of inflation.

They worry about the crushing impact of taxes, about making dumb mistakes with money, about having less than the Jones’ next door, or about missing out on a big opportunity.

Maybe most of all, they worry about running out of money before they run out of life.

All the ads we helped clients create targeted the most pressing of these worries.

Not all of those ads used Problem-Solution Leads, but in certain cases, you can get your biggest results by directly naming and promising to fix those problems.

Getting Less Direct

With our first two types, Offer Leads and Promise Leads, you've seen how aware, ready customers can respond best to a really direct approach. They're so in tune with what you're selling — or at least what they want — that you don't need much to gain their trust or attention.

But, when the worry outpaces everything else in the prospect's mind, this is where you start needing an interest-grabber that's less direct. Consider, for instance, the “solution-aware” and “problem-aware” prospects we mentioned earlier in this book.

In both cases, you have a customer who knows at least that there's a situation they want to improve. They may even suspect that, somewhere out there, there's a way to improve it.

But, with both prospect types, you're starting to see a gap in what they know about themselves and what they know about your product. This is a small gap you'll need to cross before you can start to make a sale.

And, a good Problem-Solution Lead might help you do it.

Why start there?

As you move away from customers who are “most aware,” your lead types shift to less direct because — before you can make a sale — you need that much more time to build trust.

Problem-Solution Leads are a little harder to write than Promise Leads or Offer Leads because you first must take a moment to show empathy. Think about it. In personal conversation, what's one of the ways we show a person that we're listening?

To paraphrase a President, it's “I feel your pain.”

The image shows two side-by-side direct-response advertisements. The left advertisement is for a sleep supplement. It has a dark background with a crescent moon in the top right corner. The headline reads: "Can't fall asleep? Not staying asleep? Waking too early? Never Again". Below the headline is a photo of a man in a white lab coat, identified as "Julian Whitaker, MD". To the right of the photo, text says: "The doctor who has solved today's top health problems naturally and safely for over 40,000 patients now brings you a powerful sleep solution...making sleepless nights a thing of the past." At the bottom, a blue arrow points right with the text: "Turn the page and see how it works and how YOU can get it now...". The right advertisement is for a circulation product. It has a light blue background. The headline reads: "Do your hands and feet feel like blocks of ice?". Below the headline is a photo of a hand with ice cubes on it. To the right of the photo, text says: "Discover Nature's amazing all-natural remedy for poor circulation!". Below the photo are several testimonials from customers, each with a small photo of the customer. The testimonials describe how the product helped them with circulation issues, numbness, and cold hands and feet. At the bottom right, there is a guarantee: "Guaranteed to work for you too—or it's FREE!".

While a certain prospect might not know about your specific product, or even know that a product like yours exists, he might desperately feel his problem. Just identifying it is a way to win trust by saying, “I feel your pain ... ” which then opens the door to you continuing, “ ... and I have a solution.”

When someone sees that you understand their concerns, that helps open doors. What's more, hearing

those concerns echoed can also make your target reader more willing to believe you might also be someone capable of finding a meaningful solution. This can begin a relationship between customer and seller where one didn't exist before.

So, what's the full formula for an effective Problem-Solution Lead? Sometimes it can seem as simple as identifying the problem and offering the product that answers it. But, the reality usually has a few more layers. It goes something like this ...

Target those worries that keep customers up at night.

Make sure they're worries that carry deep emotional weight.

You have to stir those emotions first, to prove you feel your prospect's pain.

You don't want to linger on the problem too long before offering hope.

You must offer hope of a relevant solution at some point in the pitch.

But, you ask, isn't it a mistake to "go negative" when you're trying to put somebody in an optimistic, buying mood? And, even if it does work, isn't it just plain wrong to make a sale by stirring up bad feelings and capitalizing on people's fears?

Reasonable questions.

After all, you don't want to come across like a health insurance salesman pitching products at his high school reunion, or a lawyer handing out business cards in the hospital cardiac unit. That said, there are times when the Problem-Solution approach to selling is not only right; it's what your customers will prefer.

How so?

When It's Right To "Go Negative"

Have you ever tried to cheer someone up — a friend, a family member, or a spouse — only to have them turn on you and start making a case for their right to feel bad?

It's a pretty common experience. Some studies even show that "up" messages directed at someone who's already feeling "down" can actually make them feel worse.

Why is that?

At least in part, it's because negative emotions that have an unwelcome way of washing over you — fear, pain, anger, frustration, shame, desperation, and more — can be isolating. It's easy to feel like you're the only one in the world who really "gets" how wrong things feel.

This is why someone who is upset or depressed by something can actually bond better with somebody else that sees what's going on and can commiserate. Simply acknowledging the problem gives it legitimacy. It can also help open up your long-suffering prospect to looking for solutions. The fact that you understand what's wrong can help make you seem like a more credible source for solutions, too.

Which problems to focus on first?

Obviously, that has a lot to do with what you're selling. More importantly, it has a lot to do with whom you're selling to. Because the most relevant worry clearly originates with the prospect, not the product. You might find that easy to accept, which puts you ahead of product-focused marketers. But, identifying what those worries are might still prove tougher than you think.

See, it's easy to imagine the practical, superficial problems most people share: pounds they want to lose, stained teeth and wrinkles, a nasty smoking habit worth quitting, pain that lingers, low savings, low income, or bad job prospects, sleepless nights, a nasty cold, undisciplined children — all of them and more, obvious obstacles to the good life.

But, behind these run even deeper feelings, including some even your prospect would find challenging to name. We refer to these as the “core emotions.” And, in Problem-Solution Leads, you'll consistently get more bang for your buck if you can tap these subconscious feelings first.

From the solution side of the equation, Master Copywriter Clayton Makepeace does a good job identifying these when he writes about what he calls “emotional relief benefits.”

“[This is the promise that] erases your prospect's fears and frustrations. It eases his feelings of guilt, shame, self-doubt, and feelings of inadequacy. It soothes nerves and ends shyness and embarrassment. It prevents future humiliation. It delivers blessed relief from loneliness, sadness, or depression. It protects them from future feelings of regret.”

You can only identify these deeper target emotions in one way, and that's by spending time “talking” to ideal prospects for whatever you're selling. Do it by speaking with them directly. Read their letters and emails to customer service; even ask if you can sit in on their calls.

Find out which blogs and magazines they read, which podcasts they listen to, and which conventions they go to. Read their posts on online forums. Meet them where you can and get them talking. Record what they're saying — if you can get their permission and don't think it will change the way they respond.

People with worries often can't help talking. Listen for the patterns, especially those things they don't realize they're saying and repeating. It's those deeper problems you're setting out to solve.

advertisement

DO YOU HAVE A SECRET FEAR OF LOSING YOUR JOB?

You and I have never met. But there's a common concern we all share. The possibility of losing our job...our business...our income. There is a way to eliminate the problem. Totally.

The solution is to develop an independent small business...one you can operate directly from your home. A business that requires only 5-10 hours a week. A business you can begin for a very small investment and build to \$12,000-\$40,000 per year income level.

I realize this sounds too simple to be true. But it's being done — quietly — by thousands of people.

I'm one of them.

A friend of mine in Collingswood, New Jersey, put together 60 of his grandmother's Polish recipes. He sold over 25,000 of them at \$4.95 each...over \$120,000 gross income.

A husband-wife team from Santa Barbara typed some instructions about how to “win at card games.” Their report generated \$14,870 in just 5 months...all cash orders...all from a small ad...all by mail.

The best part is that your small ads will keep on generating orders year after year. Here's proof:

1. Look at some year-old issues of magazines with classified ads such as *Popular Mechanics*, *Sports Afield*, etc.

- How and where to get a national ad for only \$13.50...ads you can run month after month.
- How to obtain FREE ADS — you pay only if the ad is successful.
- How to start with no money in books or supplies.
- Where to obtain thousands of different pre-printed booklets at super low whole-sale prices.
- How to word your ad — I'll include various sample ads.
- How to set up your office in a spare room or basement.
- I'll also include a giant list of “how-to” topics.
- Plus...all the sample ads, forms, lists, addresses

The key to Problem-Solution ads is often that the problem you're fixing is connected to a lot of deeper feelings, not just surface issues. Identifying the unspoken worry can be far more powerful than promising to fix a spoken one.

How Long to Linger?

Once you accept the idea that problem-based selling can work with problem-focused prospects, you run into your next question. How long should you focus on the worry in your lead before you start teasing with a solution?

First, as we said, you need to make sure you're targeting the right problem and offering the right solution. As an example, maybe you know the story of Kleenex® Brand tissues.

Depending on whom you ask, the paper company Kimberly-Clark got stuck with warehouses full of “cellucotton,” a filter product they made for gas masks at the end of World War I.

With the war over, they needed to find another market. They tried out a couple of ideas until someone hit on Kleenex® Brand “facial tissues,” a disposable replacement for towels that women back then used to remove cold cream.

And, they sold it that way, too.

In 1925, a magazine ad showed up in the *Ladies Home Journal* promising “no more dingy cold-cream towels” and showed celebrities demonstrating how they used the tissues. For the next five years, Kleenex® was sold as “the new secret of keeping a pretty skin as used by famous movie stars.”

In some of those ads, a small box suggested Kleenex® tissues might work as disposable handkerchiefs, too. Other ads also tested alternative uses for Kleenex®, everything from spare coffee filters to cleanup towels.

But, it was Kimberly-Clark’s head researcher, who suffered chronic hay fever, who pushed Kimberly-Clark’s top copywriter to rewrite the ads with the disposable handkerchief lead up front.

“Don’t Put a Cold In Your Pocket,” said the ads. Instead of putting a dirty cloth tissue back in your pocket, “It’s ‘Kleenex® Tissue Time’.”

And, it was those campaigns, along with other Problem-Solution promises like “No more sore noses — use gentle Kleenex®!” that helped create a \$1.6 billion brand.



Problem-Solution pitches have been a staple for copywriters since the early days of advertising. For instance, Kimberly-Clark’s ad department tried a lot of different ways to sell their now-famous tissues before they settled on these Problem-Solution ads that targeted cold and hay fever sufferers.

Of course, you don’t need much copy to sell cold tissues.

But notice, in Problem-Solution pitches that target both big and small, you’ll get your biggest impact when you can first sum up the core worry in as instant a phrase as possible.

Think of the problem you target as the cover on a blockbuster novel or the opening shot in a movie. On the one hand, you want your prospect to linger over it long enough to commit to your message that follows. On the other hand, you know you’ve got to stir an emotion before the prospect’s head kicks in

and reminds him about his to-do list for the rest of the day.

So, how long do you linger on the problem in your copy, assuming you've identified the biggest worry? For exactly as long as it takes to win that commitment to read on.

For simple products that solve simple worries, it might happen as early as right there in your headline. For something more complex, you might have to hold off just a little bit longer.

Understandably, we know that's an unsatisfactory and abstract answer. But, it should become clearer as we look at some samples, like the ones you'll find here:

“If This, Then That”

The classic “If-then” approach to writing a Problem-Solution Lead might be the most common you'll come across, both now and in the advertising archives.

Take this classic 1950s ad for *Geritol* ...

**AFTER FLU,
Cold, Sore Throat...
If you feel
run-down
because of
TIRED BLOOD***

Take
fast-acting **GERITOL**

FEEL STRONGER FAST
within 7 days - or money back!

AFTER THE FLU, a cold or sore throat, you may feel weak and run-down because of iron deficiency anemia. Or, as we call it, Tired Blood. At such a time, GERITOL can help you win back your strength *faster*. GERITOL, taken as directed, is an iron-rich tonic of therapeutic potency. Check with your doctor. And, if you, or anyone in your family, has suffered from the flu, a cold or sore throat and has Tired Blood, it's a wise precaution to take GERITOL *every day* to strengthen Tired Blood. Don't let Tired Blood drag you down. Take GERITOL, liquid or tablets, as directed. You'll *feel stronger fast*—within seven days or money back!

*Due to iron deficiency anemia

TABLETS
LIQUID
GERITOL
SAVE \$1.00
Buy the Economy Size

If you're feeling run down, then this will pick you up. The phrase “tired blood” isn't a medical term. *Geritol's* makers — or copywriters — cooked it up to characterize how it feels to come out of a cold or the flu.

Just reading it almost wears you down. It also makes the promise you'll “feel stronger fast” that much more life-changing. It's such a direct and simple proposition, you can see some Offer Lead creeping in:

“within 7 days — or money back!”

Just to see how an ad for a similar product did it, here’s another classic Problem-Solution pitch from around the same era. It uses nearly the same formula, only instead of “If this, then that” it’s “For Relief from this, try that” ...

For Relief Of
**SINUS
CONGESTION
and
COLDS MISERY**

**Get This Revolutionary 3-Layer Tablet—
HELPS DRAIN ALL 8 SINUS CAVITIES**

Relieves Congestion that Causes So Much Colds Suffering

DRISTAN Decongestant Tablets...the amazing medical discovery that has brought unprecedented relief to millions of sinus sufferers...also offers dramatic relief from colds distress.

That's because...for the first time, DRISTAN makes it possible to unite certain medically-proved ingredients into one fast-acting uncoated tablet.

Working through the bloodstream, it reaches all sinus areas and relieves congestion deep within head areas inaccessible to other forms of medication. It shrinks swollen sinus membranes and helps promote free drainage. Then, as clogged passages are cleared, relief from colds miseries follows.

Free breathing is restored. Pressure and pain relieved. Fever reduced. Postnasal drip controlled.

DRISTAN GIVES YOU:

- 1. The Decongestant most prescribed by doctors.
- 2. Pain Relievers, a highly effective combination of ingredients for relief of body aches and pains due to colds...plus an exclusive antihistamine to block the allergic reaction often associated with colds.
- 3. Vitamin C—actually five times your daily minimum requirement (in one day's dose) to help build body resistance to infection.

No ordinary colds medicine...whether in liquid, tablet or any other form...can benefit you in the same way as DRISTAN Decongestant Tablets.

You need no prescription for DRISTAN. Guaranteed to relieve the miseries of sinus congestion and colds...or purchase price refunded.

BEFORE—sinuses and nasal passages clogged with germ-laden mucus...responsible for so much colds suffering.

AFTER—all nose and sinus areas decongested...free, comfortable breathing restored.

There's Nothing Like DRISTAN® Decongestant Tablets!

The emotional pull of the problem is all in the mention of the “misery” and the image, with arrows pointing to the blocked areas of an appropriately-miserable man. You can see that the power of the solution is also tied up in the specific details of a “3-Layer Tablet” that “Helps Drain All 8 Sinus Cavities.”

“Inversions”

Gene Schwartz was a big fan of what he called “Negative Promise” leads. We might call them “Inversion” or “Solution-Problem” leads, because what they do is flip the formula around and promise a way to get yourself out of a situation before highlighting the problem itself.

This is also something you can see in ads going way back. For instance, there’s a yellowed old newspaper ad for *Pond’s Vanishing Cream* that shows a drawing of a woman bather who’s barely showing any skin, aside a headline and lead copy that reads ...

“Get all the benefits of Summer sunshine but avoid the discomforts.”

“You will find that your skin will not blister and burn half as readily if you protect it before exposing it. Apply Pond’s Extract Vanishing Cream and ... it will [also] soften dried, scorched skin and keep it from peeling, leaving you a rich, beautiful tan ... ”

It’s a foregone conclusion with claims that set out to solve a problem before you even have it. Here’s another old-school example, from a Solution-Problem headline for a property ad:

“How to Do Wonders With a Little Land!”

It ran against a more conventional Problem-Solution Lead, under the headline “*A Little Land — a Lot of Living*” and beat it by 40%. And, it beat a flat-out — if abstract — Promise Lead that ran under the headline, “*Two Acres and Security*,” by a crushing 75% margin.

“Identification”

Of course, you’re not just writing to the problem, but to the person who has the problem and feels strongly about it.

So, it’s no wonder some of the most successful Problem-Solution Leads are written to make the reader feel identified by their troubles or even directly responsible for them.

For instance ...

“Advice to Wives Whose Husbands Don’t Save Money — By a Wife”

“To People Who Want to Write — But Can’t Get Started”

“For the Woman Who is Older Than She Looks”

This last one ran against a headline that was all solution, no problem, “For the Woman Who Looks Younger Than She Is” and outperformed it by a big margin. Why?

Most likely because the latter targets a woman who doesn’t feel like she needs a change, where the former is all about an emotion the prospect would love to rid herself of — frustration with looking older than she should.

“The Question”

You’ll find many successful Problem-Solution ads phrased as challenging questions.

Here are a couple of examples you might recognize ...

“Are You Ever Tongue-Tied at a Party?”

“Do You Do Any of These Ten Embarrassing Things?”

And, of course this one from great Madison Avenue copywriter Maxwell Sackheim:

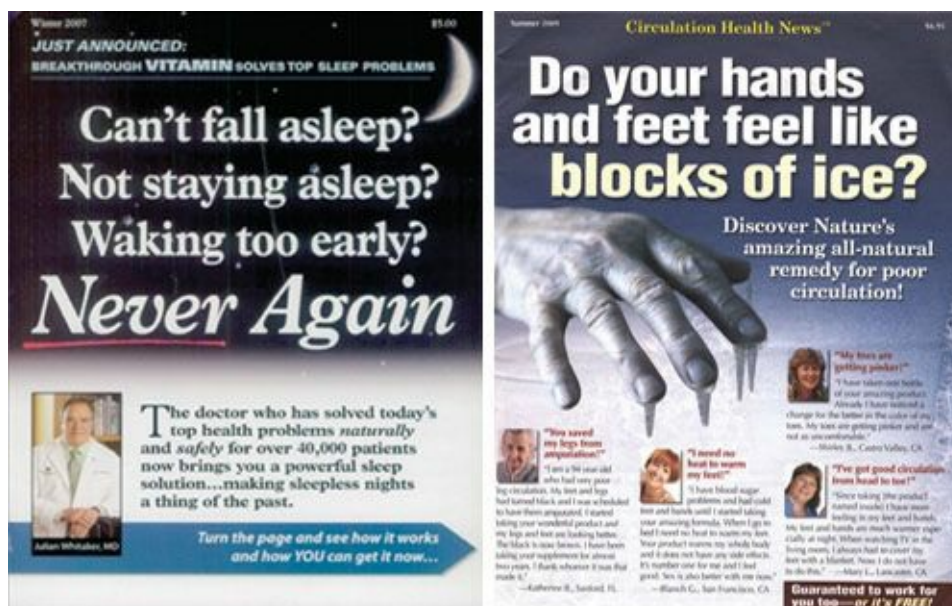
“Do You Make These Mistakes in English?”

Sackheim tried other ads, including a simple Promise Lead under the headline, “*15 Minutes a Day Gives You a Wonderful Command of Language*,” and a Secret Lead under the headline, “*His New Invention Finds and Corrects Your Mistakes in English*.”

But, we agree with ad archivist Lawrence Bernstein of infomarketingblog.com, who points out that one of the keys that makes this ad work is the word “these” in this headline. Plus, the fact that it targets the

deeper emotions in a way the other leads don't: the shame and embarrassment connected to the mundane subject of grammar.

Questions also work in Problem-Solution Leads because they jump-start the mental conversation with your prospect. Once well-targeted customers answer "Yes" to what you're asking, it's that much tougher for them to quit reading.



Asking a question about a problem with an inevitable "Yes" answer from the right prospect is a strong way to jump-start a conversation with your customer.

"Instruction"

If you have a problem that's a little more complex to address, another technique that can work is to invent a name for the problem that characterizes it quickly.

We're sure you've seen at least some of these famous examples:

"Have You a 'Worry' Stock?"

"Is Your Home Picture-Poor?"

"How Much Is 'Worker Tension' Costing Your Company?"

All of these headlines are also questions but with the added twist and intrigue of a term your prospect hasn't heard before. The key is that the term, even though it's new, instantly makes sense of the negative situation (a lot like the phrase "tired blood" in the earlier *Geritol* ad).

Of course, creating a new term means that somewhere the lead will have to explain what it means. In this way, these kinds of ads are also usually "instructional." They teach the customer something about the negative situation, even as they promise to free him from it. Here's another example but without the invented term:

"Five Familiar Skin Troubles — Which Do You Want to Overcome?"

In 10 words, the headline promises to teach the prospect something about "five familiar skin troubles," nearly assumes he'll have at least one of them — the "which" here is like the "these" in the famous Sackheim headline we looked at earlier — and teases hope for a solution.

Could an ad that simply asked "Do You Suffer One of These Five Familiar Skin Troubles?" have

Here's another Problem-Solution Lead example, though this time without depending on any invented terms in the headline. It was also written by Max Sackheim:

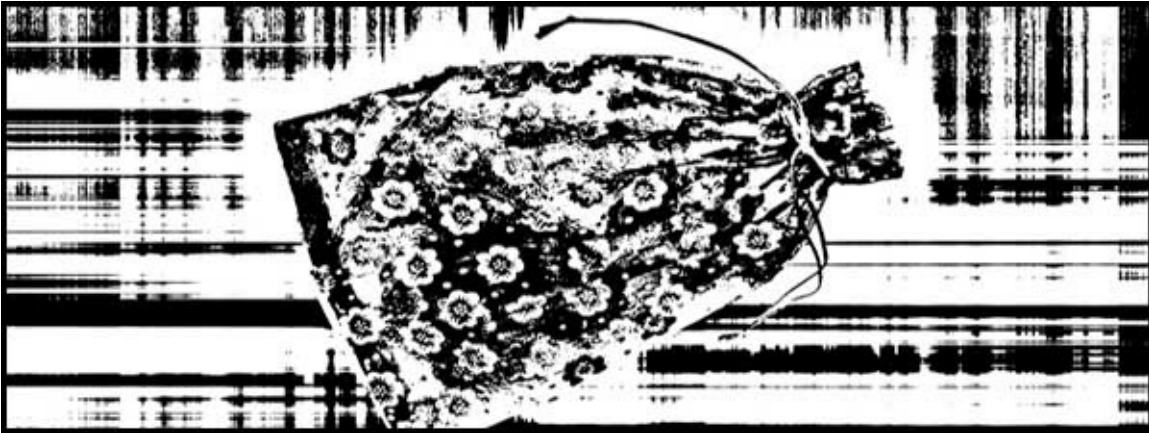
Obviously, it riffs on the idea of “Seven Deadly Sins.” He’s created what feels like a definitive list of big mistakes you really don’t want to make. Really, it’s just a way to make common advertising mistakes feel more memorable.

Of course, deciding whether to use one of these approaches to the Problem-Solution formula hinges on the idea that you're writing to prospects who know what they'd like to change.

The pulling power isn't in educating the reader about a problem. It's more in the idea that his or her troubles are heard and understood.

Once the reader feels that you've heard him, that you understand his problems, and his need for a solution, then he'll be ready to listen to your solutions to those problems — solutions that come through your product.

The Magic of the Velvet Pouch



“Life is 95% anticipation.”

— Gloria Swanson

In this chapter, you will discover a technique that has recently become the dominant lead type in the information publishing industry.

In the past five years alone, it has been responsible for more than a billion dollars worth of sales.

We know of one copywriter who used this lead type for a health package. It worked so well that he was offered a six-figure contract as a senior copywriter.

We know another group of copywriters who used this technique last year to create more than \$40 million worth of sales for their publisher and gave themselves all very substantial bonuses.

We have used this technique to our own advantage many times in recent years. In fact, it is one of the two most powerful lead techniques working today.

It won't take you weeks to develop this technique. You will probably pick it up fairly quickly because it is something that you already know how to do.

Let me tell you a story about the velvet pouch.

Almost forty years ago, I got a job selling pots and pans to flight attendants in Queens, New York, near LaGuardia Airport.

I was trained for this job by a master. His name was Harry. He had been selling products door-to-door for thirty of his forty-five years at the time. I was working part-time, as I was in my senior year of college. Harry didn't think much of formal education. “Why do you want to waste your time reading a bunch of dusty old books?” he'd ask me. “Everything you need to know about life you can learn by knocking on doors.”

Harry was wrong about that, but he knew an awful lot about salesmanship. Many of the secrets of marketing I've discovered since then were based on the fundamentals of selling that Harry taught me.

One of the most important of these fundamentals Harry called the velvet pouch.

After gaining admittance to the apartment, Harry would start his pitch about the quality of our cookware, taking out the pots and pans individually from his case. But, they were each encased in plush, royal blue velvet pouches. As Harry described the features and benefits of the cookware, he would gently massage the pots, first from outside over the velvet pouches, and then by slipping his hands inside them but still keeping them hidden from the prospect.

“Just keep your eye on the customer,” he told me. “In the beginning they’ll be looking at you. But as you go on, you’ll notice that they will shift their focus to the pots and pans. That let’s you know they are getting interested. Keep hitting them with the benefits while they stare at what you’re doing. And never, ever take the pots out until you know they have the prospects’ full attention.”

It was a visual gimmick that had great power. Harry closed almost a hundred percent of the prospects he got to look at those velvet pouches. The more he fondled them from without and from within, the more intrigued they seemed. When he finally withdrew the gleaming pot, you could see their eyes widen. Sometimes they literally oohed and aahed.

I didn’t fully understand what was happening at the time, but now I realize what Harry was doing. He was creating emotional tension by talking about the benefits of the product without showing it. The prospect’s instinctive desire to discover what was in the velvet pouch played in Harry’s favor. The longer he could get the prospect mesmerized by the hidden product, the greater the chance he would close.

The same psychological principal is what makes the technique we will be examining in this chapter so powerful.

It taps into a very basic human instinct that can’t be resisted. That’s why, when used properly, it has such power.

As I said, this secret has become more commonplace in recent years. Before then, most direct marketers relied on the other, more traditional techniques we’ve been talking about: Offers, Promises, Problem-Solution Leads, and occasionally Story Leads.

The first time I used this technique was about ten years ago.

Working with a junior copywriter, we launched a new financial publication using it. That sales letter was a runaway blockbuster. It generated tens of millions of dollars of sales and turned that junior copywriter into a multimillionaire. Seeing that success, about a dozen other copywriters adapted that same lead type for their promotions and the result was massive and undeniable. Together, they accounted for more than a billion dollars in sales in the following four years.

Nowadays, this lead type is the preferred one for selling not just information products but natural supplements, body building systems, marketing programs, stock market systems, and diets — just to name a few.

It is a simple technique, but it has rules that must be followed. If you learn these rules and use them consistently, you will see the amazing power this lead type can give your copy.

Would you like to know what this technique is?

It is the “secret” — starting your sales presentation off by teasing the prospect with a secret.

Harry created a sort of secret when he put the pots and pans in velvet pouches. The prospect, seeing them enclosed in such nice, soft cases, couldn’t help but imagine what they looked like. The more Harry talked about their many useful and valuable qualities, the more they wanted to see them. By withholding

the “reveal” until he had finished his pitch, he achieved the goal of all leads — he had emotionally persuaded them that they wanted it before they even saw what it looked like.

Agora founder and legendary copywriter Bill Bonner has this to say about the power of the secret:

The Secret Lead really connects to a deep instinct in people to feel that there are secrets to things; that the things that you know and are obvious to everybody don’t give you any edge. What everybody knows is what everybody knows and once you know what everybody knows, you’re just like everybody else.

If you want to get an edge, you need to know something that everybody doesn’t know and those things tend to be secrets. You look at people who are very rich, for example, and you say, “What’s his secret?” Or, you look at somebody who is 60-years-old with beautiful skin and perfect body and perfect hair and you say, “Oh, what’s her secret?”

We feel there must be secrets to these things because they’re not obvious. So, part of us wants to know. We don’t believe these things are random. We don’t believe the world works in a random way; it’s just by accident that people get that way. We believe there must be a secret. So, if you reveal the secret, you already have a lot of people who want to listen to you.

Let’s see how this works in the following copy.

Closed to New Investors for the Last 6 Years — Now Open Again ...

The “Chaffee Royalty Program” That Turned Every \$1 Into \$50

Now, let me ask you: What is a *Chaffee Royalty Program*? Do you know?

No? Well, don’t feel bad. You aren’t supposed to know. The copywriter made it up!

He invented the phrase because he didn’t want the prospect to know exactly what he was talking about. He wanted to get the reader excited before he told him what it was.

We used to call this process *neologizing* — giving some key concept a new name in order to spark interest.

Let’s continue reading this lead a while and see how long the copy goes before the term is explained. This is the literary equivalent of the velvet pouch.

The copywriter who wrote this was trying to get his prospect to ask, “What is this Chaffee Royalty Program?” To find out, he must read on. “I’ll give this another minute or so,” he thinks — unconsciously. And, that is as much time as the copywriter needs to set the hook deeper.

So, that is the first thing to notice here: this velvet-pouch trick that holds the reader’s attention. But, that is not all the copywriter has done. The headline continues:

In 2002, the same royalty “paycheck program” that paid out \$50 for every \$1 invested ...
decided to shut the door to new “members.”

In 2008, that door is open again ... and it just got easier than ever to “make money while
you sleep” ...

**But the door will slam shut again right at Midnight on Wednesday, May 28, so
you’d better collect your own “Chaffee Royalties” right NOW ...**

Now, what's the copywriter doing?

He is sinking the hook deeper by attaching a specific claim to it: that the Chaffee Royalty Program paid out 50-to-1 in 2002. And then, he pushes the hook in deeper. For some reason, in 2008 (the year this promotion was written), the same opportunity has been opened up again for a short period of time.

The reader thinks, "Hmm. This is interesting. This Chafee Royalty Program, whatever it is, produced a huge return six years ago. And now, this advertisement is telling me, it might do the same thing again. I should read on."

So, he reads on.

Dear Reader,

Doing nothing while collecting royalties has to be one of the best — and easiest — ways to get rich.

"I like the idea of 'doing nothing while collecting royalties,'" the reader thinks. He reads on.

For instance, David Sengstack does nothing and collects royalty paychecks of \$2 *million* per year ... just because his dad was smart enough to buy the commercial rights to a song you've sung a hundred times, "Happy Birthday to You."

Michael Jackson does nothing and collects royalties every time a Beatles song plays on the radio (he bought the rights years ago). But, Paul McCartney — now a billionaire — does nothing and collects even more on the 3,000 song rights from other artists that he owns.

Paul Newman made plenty acting. But, licensing his name piles up even more donations for his favorite charities — over \$200 million so far — from royalties on the Newman's Own food line.

Even boxer George Foreman does better doing nothing than he did fighting in the ring, thanks to the \$137 million royalty checks he gets for lending his name to a grill.

No wonder the world's richest investor calls collecting royalties the best business in the world. It's literally one of the easiest ways to do nothing and "make money while you sleep."

"All these rich guys are somehow involved in this Chafee Royalty Program," the reader thinks. "Maybe it's legitimate."

What might shock you is that there actually IS a way for *anybody* to tap into a pool of growing royalties ... wealth that piles up by itself ... that, ultimately, could be worth more than the *entire Beatles catalog, all the commercial rights to "Happy Birthday," and the total value of the top 25 most expensive works of art in the world ... combined*.

And, you can set it up in less than five minutes.

"Hmm. This is pretty interesting. I can get in on this in less than five minutes?"

I call it the "Chaffee Royalty Program," after a former schoolteacher and wealthy American millionaire, Jerome B. Chaffee. Just like people who make a living collecting royalty checks, you don't need to do anything once you've tapped into the program.

You just sit back and watch the money pile up.

The prospect has now read a page-and-a-half of copy. He is intrigued — no, more than intrigued. And yet, he still doesn't know what the Chaffee Royalty Program is.

He knows that some of the most famous people in the world including Paul McCartney and George

Foreman are involved in it. He knows, too, that the richest investor in the world thinks its hot stuff. The hook is getting deeper.

So, he reads on.

8 Americans Who Just Cashed in on “Chaffee Royalties”

Even though I’m almost positive you’ve never heard of “Chaffee Royalties,” some of America’s wealthiest families have — though by another name. In fact, it’s a secret that’s made more than a few Americans exceedingly rich.

- Robert Friedland made millions of dollars when his “Chaffee Royalty” holdings jumped in value from \$4 to \$167 in just two years.
- George Hearst borrowed the \$3,000 he used to buy his way into “Chaffee Royalties” in Nevada. Within months, his stake had grown to \$91,000 — money he used to buy even more royalty rights, which ultimately launched his empire.
- Jim Fair, a former Illinois farmer, got so rich with his “Chaffee Royalties,” he was able to hand his daughter a \$1 million check as a wedding present.
- William O’Brien earned enough from his “Chaffee Royalties” to make him one of the 100 richest Americans of *all time*.
- Former California carpenter John Mackay scraped together \$500 to buy his first share in a “Chaffee Royalty Program.” He made enough to build a mansion surrounded by 70 acres of land and formal gardens for his son.
- E.J. “Lucky” Baldwin parked his last \$800 in “Chaffee Royalties” while living in Virginia City, Nev. By the time he was through, he’d piled up royalty wealth worth over \$5 million.
- James Flood, who came to the U.S. with next to nothing, got so rich on “Chaffee Royalties” he was able to build a beautiful sandstone home on top of San Francisco’s famous Nob Hill. It’s still there today.
- Then there’s Stanley Dempsey. A lawyer who quit law and put his money into “Chaffee Royalty” contracts now makes his living collecting on *23 different streams* of royalty income. **Forbes** even featured Dempsey and called his fortune “virtual gold,” since he barely has to do or run anything to keep the money rolling in.

Now, the hook is deeply buried in his gut. “All these regular folks are taking advantage of it,” he thinks. “Why can’t I?”

And, the copywriter has an answer for him:

But, there’s no reason you can’t collect anytime you like.

In fact, now that these “Chaffee Royalty Programs” trade directly on the stock exchange, you can get in anytime you like. And with the right timing, you can get in at a very good price. And then, start seeing gains from “Chaffee Royalties” immediately.

This is the situation we’re in right now.

Which is why I’m writing you today. See in 2002, one of the most impressive Chafee Royalty opportunities of all time closed its doors to new funds, just after delivering a 50-to-1 payoff for its earliest members.

And for reasons I'll share, the timing now is better than ever.

What's more, today, there's more than one way to lock into "Chaffee Royalties." And one of those options, according to research that took me *nine months* to pull together, *could pay out even better than what was once the most profitable "Chaffee Royalty" opportunity of all time.*

We'll get to those details.

But first, let's start at the beginning ...

The reader's interest is peaking now because he is being told that the opportunity won't last very long. He has to take action soon.

Finally, he gets his answer. Or, begins to get it ...

The "Chaffee Royalty Program" That Changed America

Jerome B. Chaffee didn't make enough as a schoolteacher. So, he took a job as a sales clerk in a dry goods store. Then he took that money and started a dry goods store of his own.

When that wasn't enough, he packed his bags and went to Colorado in 1860.

See, Colorado then — as right now — was mineral rich. And, even though Chaffee knew next to nothing about mining, he saw the possibilities. And, started snapping up the "royalty rights" on as many gold and silver claims as he could afford.

I won't take you through the rest of the letter. I will tell you it was very, very successful. It generated thousands of subscriptions and millions of dollars. And, the reason it was successful is the subject of this chapter.

Introducing the Secret Lead

Next to the Story Lead, the **Secret Lead** is the most universal and useful. It can be used to sell just about any sort of proprietary product or service.

We have used and seen the Secret Lead used to sell everything — from investment newsletters to kitchen knives.

The purpose of a Secret Lead is the same as any lead: to get the reader to keep reading until the prime benefits and Unique Selling Proposition of the product are fully presented.

The mechanism is the secret. It is presented in the headline and not revealed until after the prospect has read everything the copywriter wants him to read.

To understand how powerful this is, let's look at the Secret headline again:

Closed to New Investors for the Last 6 Years — Now Open Again ...

The "Chaffee Royalty Program" That Turned Every \$1 Into \$50

Now, compare that to the following:

Closed to New Investors for the Last 6 Years — Now Open Again ...

A Dividend Strategy That Turned Every \$1 Into \$50

This, as you can see, is considerably less intriguing.

The prospect for this promotion, an avid investment newsletter reader, has seen hundreds of stock schemes in his time. He is skeptical of them. Yet, he is still looking.

The copywriter who wrote the “Chaffee Royalty Program” letter knew that. So, he wanted to do something that would hold his reader’s attention for a few minutes. If he could only keep him reading long enough to explain the product’s Unique Selling Proposition, he would have a chance to make the sale. So, he created a hook: an intriguing name for an investment service that specializes in natural resources stocks.

A good Secret Lead, in the hands of a clever copywriter, can compel the casual reader to read a dozen or more pages of copy before the secret is revealed. In this case, the second version of the same headline might have stopped the reader cold.

Now, let’s get back to the copy we have just read. We’ve shown you the technique of the velvet pouch and how the copywriter used it while he was making three promises:

That this secret has the power to turn a single dollar into fifty

That the prospect can learn the secret in five minutes

That he can sit back and benefit from it like rich people who collect royalty checks without doing anything

All three promises are strong. The first one promises significant profits — the kind of profits that can make a person wealthy. The second one promises ease of understanding and implementation. Making a solution easy is always a very good thing to do. The third promise appeals to everyone who has ever dreamed of owning a money tree — which is just about any person who is likely to read this promotion.

In fact, most of the 300 to 400 words that comprise this lead are devoted to illustrating this promise. Beginning with a man who collects \$2 million a year from royalties on Happy Birthday to celebrity check-cashers like Michael Jackson, Paul Newman, and George Foreman. And then, moving to eight bulleted examples of others who got rich or are getting rich cashing in royalty checks.

Royalty checks? Well, not exactly. These aren’t royalties in the way that Michael Jackson’s estate collects royalties when Beatles records are bought or played. They are stock returns and dividends — an altogether different thing.

Dividend stocks are rather ordinary in the investment world. They definitely don’t have the sex appeal that something called The Chaffee Royalty Program would.

And that is why the copywriter began with Newman and Foreman and Jackson and then switched to the others. He wanted to take full advantage of the emotional impact of royalty checks. It’s a bit of a conceptual bait and switch — letting attributes of one thing carry over into another.

At both Agora and AWAI, we call this type of secret ***transubstantiation***. This means we turn something ordinary (like water or mining stock returns) into something special (like wine or advertising royalty checks). It’s another useful technique that is often used by Master Copywriters when crafting Secret Leads.

Read the lead again. See how the copywriter engages the prospect by providing teasing details that seem like they are revealing the secret, but never quite do. The prospect’s initial interest is merely to find out what the Chaffee Royalty Program is. But sentence by sentence, the copywriter makes the secret more appealing. Before the copywriter reveals that the program is a dividend investment strategy, the prospect

has decided he wants to get in on this investing opportunity. By now, he is willing to read the entire sales letter to find out more.

In this case, the reader discovers the full secret before he buys the product. But, in many promotional packages that use the Secret Lead, the nature of the secret is never revealed. To find out, the prospect must buy the product.

Let's take a look at another Secret Lead. This, too, is for an investment newsletter promotion.

Texas Company Tapping \$2.8 Trillion Oil Reserve... Under the Eiffel Tower

Some company in Texas has struck oil. In Paris! And under the Eiffel Tower!

"That's pretty amazing," the reader thinks. "I didn't know there was any oil beneath the Eiffel Tower!"

So, he reads on:

Tiny company from Dallas preparing to extract 40 billion barrels of crude oil from
beneath Paris, France ...

Discovery big enough to fuel U.S. demand for 5.2 years, according to Energy Information
Administration ...

Estimates show 4,620% gains for investors who get in now ... *before* this oil comes to
market ...

The first word he reads, "tiny," helps him understand why hasn't heard about this before. It is a tiny company. But, it's from Dallas. "This can't be a hoax," he thinks. "The writer is telling me that the company is located in Dallas. It must be real."

Most investors these days are skeptical. And, the best prospects are the most skeptical because they have read and responded to more offers than most. They are aware, if only unconsciously, that they are reading an advertisement. They are looking for clues that this particular advertisement is factually based. The copywriter knows that, so he is handing out teasing little details as the lead progresses.

The prospect reads on to discover more specifics:

The size of the oil find is 40 billion barrels.

That is big enough to supply America's fuel needs for more than five years.

Someone has estimated that this discovery could produce investment returns of more than 4,000%.

Once again, the copywriter is sinking in the hook by providing teasing details that reveal more information about the secret without giving it away. And, some of those details are indirect promises. (That he can possibly make 4,000% on his money once he finds out what this stock is.)

The reader continues:

Dear Reader,

It could be the richest oil deposit in Western Europe.

But, very few even know of its existence ... yet.

Even leading oilmen in the U.S. have no idea.

Because ... well ... *who ever thought of looking for oil beneath the Eiffel Tower?*

In just four simple sentences, the copywriter has explained away an objection that must surely come into the reader's mind. If this discovery is so big, why haven't I read about it?

He reads on:

Indeed, while Parisians sip coffee and nibble croissants in Montmartre ... as tourists stroll through the Louvre, and walk along the Left Bank ... there's an ocean of sweet crude oil bubbling directly beneath their feet.

The copywriter creates a picture of the promise. This is effective because it excites the reader's imagination and reduces his skepticism at the same time.

He can practically see all those billions of barrels of oil floating in an underground sea beneath Paris.

He reads on:

The French Oil Ministry has confirmed more than 40 billion barrels.

It's enough to fuel total U.S. oil demand for 5.2 years, according to the Energy Information Administration.

Enough to fill more than 2.54 million Olympic-sized swimming pools ...

And 27 times more oil than ExxonMobil produces annually ...

The reader discovers that the French Oil Ministry has confirmed the finding. This is sounding more credible. The reader's skepticism is further diminished.

He continues:

Perhaps most amazingly, the rights to every drop of this oil now belong to one little company from Dallas, Texas!

When it brings this mother lode to market later this year, the company will multiply its oil inventory 5,632-fold.

No wonder Goldman Sachs and Barclays are quietly building positions in the stock before the big event.

"Goldman Sachs and Barclays?" the reader thinks. "Those are well-known names. If they are investing in it, it must be the real thing!"

He keeps reading:

And, no wonder they're keeping this news to themselves — not telling a single one of their retail clients.

"Gee," the reader thinks. "I'm glad I'm reading this. I'm going to find out what Goldman Sachs' retail clients don't even know!"

Over the next few minutes, you'll discover all the details of this opportunity.

And, you'll learn how you could turn a small speculation of \$5,000 into \$231,000 starting just a few weeks from today.

But, you must act right now.

Let's get right to the details ...

The copywriter knows that the hook is in deep. So, he makes a promise now, that he will reveal "the details" of this opportunity in just a few minutes. He also promises to tell them how they can profit from the information. And, he asks them to keep reading to find out more details. And, they will.

Let's look at one more investment newsletter lead, this one from Stansberry & Associates:

The Only Investment Legally Obligated to Pay You 181% Gains By June 15, 2009

It's not a stock, option, or gov't bond ... But this unusual investment has crushed the S&P 500 by 543% since 2001, according to a recent Dow Jones report.

By now, you're beginning to see how this is working. The copywriter has created a Unique Selling Proposition with the phrase "only investment *legally obligated* to pay you 181% gains by June 15, 2009."

The investment isn't named. So, the prospect reads on to find out what it is.

Dear S&A Subscriber,

What if I told you there's an investment that could pay you 181% gains over the next 12 months ...

And that this money is SECURED by a legal contract ...

Would you be interested?

Well, how about if I told that your 181% gain is required BY LAW to be delivered on this EXACT date: **June 15, 2009.**

The copywriter has done nothing but repeat the claims made in the headline, a very common and successful pattern with Secret Leads. Restate what is said in the headline and you make it seem more credible.

And, that in addition to a 181% gain, you'd also be legally entitled to collect 3 interest payments over that same period, bringing your total return to 227% ...

... Turning every \$10,000 invested into \$32,700, with almost 100% certainty.

Still interested?

Well, before I go any further, I should warn you: After reading this, you may never want to buy stocks, EVER again.

That's because this unique opportunity has nothing to do with the stock market ... government bonds ... mutual funds ... or options.

Instead, it's something we call a "**Secured Investment Contract.**"

So, you see what is happening here: The copywriter neologizes. He's come up with a clever phrase to introduce the Unique Selling Proposition. If he gave it its conventional name, it would seem mundane.

What are "Secured Investment Contracts" exactly?

In short, these Contracts offer you a way to collect gains that are potentially as big as the fastest moving stocks. The big difference is, your gains are *secured by a legal agreement*.

Even better ... you'll know, months ahead of time, exactly when and how much you should be paid.

Let me show you how it works ...

It seems like the copywriter has just explained the term, but in fact he's revealed nothing more than he had already. Yet, because the copywriter posed the question the reader has been asking (What is a Secured Investment Contract?) and provides a summary in different words, the reader feels that progress is being made.

So, the prospect continues reading. In doing so, he gets his curiosity further aroused by techniques you've already seen.

The copywriter strengthens his case by providing teasing details. He tells the reader that Secured Investment Contracts are offered by U.S. corporations. And, they are somehow more "secure" than shares of stock.

He then gives an "example" of a specific trade that adds no new clue to solve the puzzle. But, it is more information.

The copywriter wants there to be no question of how valuable the secret is, so he does the math for the reader — a \$10,000 investment returning 227% would be worth \$32,700.

And, he continues adding specific evidence to the copy including a list of dates secured payments were made.

Here is a core secret about writing Secret Leads: Specificity is absolutely required to overcome the skepticism that secrets automatically evoke.

Not Just for Financial Promotions

As Bill Bonner said, "The Secret Lead really connects to a deep instinct in people to feel that there are secrets to things."

Since secrets instinctually inhabit all aspects of our lives, Secret Leads have been used successfully in different direct marketing niches, not just financial.

So, let's take a look at how Secret Leads can work in two other examples, the first from the self-improvement/self-actualization niche in the following promotion from Learning Strategies Corporation.



In this promo, the prospect is probably familiar with the word "dowsing" — the practice of searching for water or valuable minerals using a dowsing rod. But here, it's used in a much different context, raising the question "What's that?"

What exactly is “Diamond Dowsing”? The envelope hints at it being a way to discover ancient secrets and modern solutions. But, no more information than that is available. The fact that it’s tied up with someone named Marie Diamond doesn’t diminish the intrigue. Is it dowsing *for* diamonds? Is it dowsing *with* diamonds? What exactly is it?

Without using the word “secret,” this phrase (a neologism like we’ve seen before) is exactly that: A secret that might deeply affect the prospect’s life. The secret aspect of the promo is reinforced as soon as the prospect begins reading the letter:

**How you can use “dowsing” to take anything you’re doing to radically higher levels
... making money, exercising, playing, working, sleeping, meditating, even
PhotoReading ... *you name it!***

Dear Friend,

I used to think dowsing was just for finding water, until our Feng Shui Master Marie Diamond gave me a spectacular demonstration that changed my mind.

You see, many people assume that the problems they have in their lives are caused by something they’re doing. Marie showed me this might not be the case at all.

If you have issues or struggles that just won’t go away, it might not be your fault but actually your home or office that is attracting them.

These issues could be the result of “geopathic stress,” “interference lines,” or “negative energy vortexes.” I’ll talk about these later — right now you merely need to know that you can easily learn how to use dowsing to find and resolve these problem areas.

Marie showed us jaw-dropping demonstrations

In the summer of 2005, Marie Diamond, Paul Scheele, and I met up for a week in Aspen, Colorado. Marie brought brass L-shaped dowsing rods and began demonstrating how to use them within seconds of meeting up with her.

First, she used the dowsing rods (divining rods) to show us energy lines that thread the Earth and in one way or another affect all living things. I was surprised at how the dowsing rods opened when Marie approached these stress lines.

Sleeping on these energy lines can create nightmares, sleeplessness, and even illness.

In this first page of an 8-page letter, the reader is given a lot of “facts” — ideas like geopathic stress, interference lines, and the like. The copywriter has also started talking very specifically about proof — “jaw-dropping demonstrations” — that dowsing can solve problems.

The copy continues like this throughout the next 7 pages. But, the real secret of “dowsing” is *never* revealed. It’s teased and danced around in a way that the reader feels she’s getting some real, substantial information.

But, the secret is kept cleverly hidden in the words and phrases.

If an energy line goes through your garden, it can even retard the growth of plants or make them

susceptible to disease and drought.

Remember, Marie Diamond knows how energy works not only because she is a Feng Shui Master and has worked with Dowsing Masters the world over for years but because she sees energy.

You see, she has a rare gift: She can actually see energy flow, much like how you and I can see water flow in a river. This ability makes what she says infinitely credible and valuable.

You cannot expect the prospect to believe everything you say — especially about a secret as mystical as this one — simply because you say it. So, the copywriter provides “proof.”

Marie then showed us positive and negative energy vortexes. She told the story of one of her clients who owned a failing retail store. Marie used the dowsing rods to uncover a negative vortex right on the cash register. Marie neutralized it, and immediately the business began to thrive. She said, “It was as if the vortex repelled customers.”

Diamond Dowsing and The Secret

We were in Aspen that summer for a meeting of the Transformational Leadership Council. Another phenomenon was born there, too. Rhonda Byrne showed up with a film crew and a wild idea about a movie called *The Secret*. As a matter of fact, much of *The Secret* was filmed right there during the meeting. That’s how Marie Diamond got into the film herself.

The readers of this promotion have at least heard about the movie *The Secret*. In all likelihood, they’ve seen it more than once. So, the copywriter ties that movie’s credibility back to Marie Diamond and her secret.

Much of our Transformational Leadership Council meetings involve members presenting mini-workshops so we can learn each other’s specialties. The first day’s events in Aspen were awkward and uncharacteristically boring.

That evening, Marie whipped out her dowsing rods and walked over the exact spot where the presenters had stood — and the rods began spinning wildly in a counterclockwise direction. This indicated a negative energy vortex.

When Marie neutralized the energy, the rods quit spinning. For the remaining few days, the presentations were more engaging than ever! (I wonder how much of the great energy in *The Secret* came from Marie’s dowsing.)

I found an “Energy Vortex” in my own home!

So, the actual secret isn’t really about Diamond Dowsing. It’s about how to neutralize negative energy. But, that subtle shift came about unnoticed. The reader doesn’t care at this point. She just wants to know how to use Marie Diamond’s gifts to improve her life.

And, we don’t learn until much later that the way to do it is by learning from Marie directly — in a special DVD course.

We see this same formula followed in the following promotion from Rodale Press for a book about “Square Foot Gardening.” Notice how this lead actually combines two different lead types very

successfully: a Secret Lead and a Promise Lead.



The promise here is direct and clearly stated: you will have “Your Most Bountiful Garden ... Ever!” But, this bounty is going to come from just a few square feet. And, that’s where the secret comes in. The fascination with how that will happen is what really brings the prospect into the letter.

On this envelope, there is nothing to give a hint at what this technique is except that “You’ll love the ease and results of this proven gardening technique.” As you begin reading the body copy, the promise remains strong and the secret remains hidden. But, as with the previous examples, the copywriter feigns revealing the secret.

Dear Fellow Gardener,

Grow the same bounty of tomatoes, peppers, and beans in one tiny 4 x 4 foot space as you’d get in a 20-foot row? Yes!

Make one packet of lettuce seeds last 5 to 6 years instead of planting all 1,950 of them in one season? Yes!

Grow bigger, longer-lasting tomatoes and lettuce in winter? Yes!

Garden with less work, less weeding. Less watering? Yes!

What’s the secret?

It’s a technique called “Square Foot Gardening,” I couldn’t wait to try it — and now I can’t wait to share it with you! Put down the hoe. Hang up your hose! Join hundreds of gardeners who’ve learned the secrets of ***SQUARE FOOT GARDENING*** . . . yours FREE for 21 days.

The copywriter hasn’t revealed anything substantial about the secret is except that it is a secret and that the reader can learn about it for free. (The 21-days barely comes into the reader’s consciousness at this

point).

The copywriter answers the question in the first subhead “What’s the secret?” with his next subhead. Only he doesn’t really answer it at all.

An easier, more foolproof way to garden — anywhere

The revealed secret — an easier, more foolproof way — is a dodge, a way of presenting the big promise clothed as the “secret.”

The copywriter then gives a bit more to further sharpen the prospect’s interest.

Traditional methods like rows, tilling, and irrigation were all designed for farmers ... and tractors. But now, with **SQUARE FOOT GARDENING**, you can grow all your favorites in your garden with a lot less work.

The copywriter seems closer to revealing the secret by telling *what it isn’t*. You’ve seen this previously in the “Secured Investment Contract” promo: “That’s because this unique opportunity has nothing to do with the stock market ... government bonds ... mutual funds ... or options.”

By telling the prospect what the secret is not, you have him feeling he is closer to finding out what it is.

The Square Foot Garden promotion goes on to follow a similar structure to the others we’ve examined. And, what is that hidden, “secret” structure?

What Patterns Can You Observe in Secrets Lead?

Since we first began to think about leads in this way, we have created and/or edited thousands of them. What we have found is that the most successful have certain commonalities:

1. The secret is intriguing and beneficial
2. It is introduced in the headline
3. It is not disclosed during the lead
4. As the letter progresses, more clues are given

Not every successful Secret Lead has this precise pattern, but we have found that most successful ones do.

It’s because this pattern is so common that we recommend the following “rules” for writing Secret Leads.

1. The Secret is Intriguing and Beneficial.

Let’s take a look at the first example headline again.

Closed to New Investors for the Last 6 Years — Now Open Again ...

The “Chaffee Royalty Program” That Turned Every \$1 Into \$50

We have already discussed in some detail how the copywriter used neologism to create intrigue. But notice, too, the super-head: Closed to New Investors for the Last 6 Years — Now Open Again. That certainly adds to the intrigue. It also, by the way, creates a sense of urgency. So, it is intriguing.

Is it beneficial? Indeed. It is a program that “turned every dollar into fifty.” For an investor, that’s

about as relevant as can be.

Any good secret will attract the reader's attention and distract him from the fact that he is reading an ad. But, if you don't connect the secret to a major benefit of the product right away, then you will make it that much harder to complete in the second part of the package (after the lead).

When you tie the benefit to the secret, you tip your copywriting hand, so to speak. You indicate to the reader that you are selling him. It is not overt but it is certainly more direct than the Story Lead.

But, even though the prospect knows that he is being sold, he can't keep his conscious mind on that because he is so intrigued by the secret.

Now, let's look at the third headline we studied:

The Only Investment Legally Obligated to Pay You 181% Gains By June 15, 2009

It's not a stock, option, or gov't bond ... But this unusual investment has crushed the S&P 500 by 543% since 2001, according to a recent Dow Jones report.

Again, you can see that it is both intriguing and beneficial.

The intrigue is achieved by two things: the "legally obligated" concept and the fact that it's not a stock, option, or government bond ...

The benefit is provided in the promise of 181% and the fact that it "crushed the S&P 500 by 543% since 2001."

In the Diamond Dowsing example, the intrigue comes from using the word "dowsing" in a way the prospect hasn't seen before. And the benefit? Taking virtually everything in your life to "radically higher levels."

And finally, the Square Foot Garden copy ... The big promise, splashed across the envelope is a grabber for any serious (and not-so-serious) gardener:

Your Most Bountiful Garden ... Ever

That's the benefit, and the intrigue comes from being able to do it in "a few square feet of any soil ... "

2. It is Introduced in the Headline.

With virtually all of the Secret Leads we have studied, the secrets were introduced immediately, in the headlines.

There is a very good reason for that. Of all the lead types, none is as instantly engaging as the Secret Lead.

Who can resist the temptation to see what is under the velvet pouch? The impulse to discover "the secret" is buried deep in the human brain.

Like stories, secrets are universal. They exist and play a role in just about every aspect of culture, from sports to cooking to espionage — even to copywriting!

We are all prone to believe that those who excel at certain things have secrets that make them better. We want to discover those secrets so we can enjoy their success.

In fact, good copywriters use the power of the velvet pouch in all sorts of ways and in every possible place in their advertisements. They are used to introduce products, to explain systems and track records,

to introduce premiums, and so on.

And, as you have already seen, they can also be used in conjunction with other types of leads to keep the reader engaged.

If you take a look at almost any Story Lead, for example, you will see that a secret is usually introduced either within the lead or just afterwards. By introducing the secret in the story, the copywriter is able to hold the reader's interest.

3. The Secret is Not Disclosed in the Lead.

Without a doubt, the most common mistake beginners make when constructing Secret Leads is to disclose the secret too soon.

Consider the effect on the reader if the copywriter had followed the Chaffee Royalty Program headline with this:

Dear Reader,

The Chaffee Royalty Program describes a system for investing in dividend stocks that we believe is amazing, etc.

The reader's curiosity is satisfied in the first sentence. If the reader believes dividend stocks are boring (as many investment readers do), he will read no further. The power of the secret created by neologizing dividend stocks into royalty programs is gone. The number of readers who continue to read drops dramatically ... as does the response rate (and the copywriter's reputation).

If this mistake weren't so common, we wouldn't even mention it here. But, for whatever reason, many copywriters feel compelled to reveal their secrets. Perhaps they feel it is too cruel to tease the reader for very long. Perhaps they are looking for the pleasure one gets from disclosing secrets.

Whatever the reason, it is a mistake to reveal it during the lead. Remember, the purpose of the lead is to persuade the reader emotionally. To do that, you have to maintain the reader's full attention until you have shown him *all* the benefits. That takes some number of words — 100 to 600 depending on the product. Those 100 to 600 words constitute the lead. Thus, the rule: Don't disclose the secret in the lead.

In fact, many Secret Lead advertisements never reveal the secret at all. Instead, they promise the revelation in a premium. As the copy progresses, the secret becomes more intriguing. The prospect reads on only to discover that he must buy the product to learn the secret and that the revelation will come alongside the product.

4. As the Letter Progresses, More Clues Are Given.

We have spent some time in reviewing these examples to see how the copywriter maintains his reader's interest by providing clues to the secret as the copy goes on.

In the Chaffee Royalty Program, for example, the prospect knows from the headline that this is an opportunity to make fifty times his money and that this opportunity, closed for the past six years, has just been opened up again.

Even in the subhead, it appears that the reader is given more clues. He finds out, for example that:

❶ In 2002, the same royalty “paycheck program” that paid out \$50 for every \$1 invested was closed new “members.”

❷ In 2008, that door is open again ... and it just got easier than ever to “make money while you sleep” ...

The door will slam shut again right at Midnight on Wednesday, May 28.

In fact, the prospect has already been told this in substance in the headline. The extra details (the more precise dating) give the reader the feeling that he is learning more, but he is not.

As the copy continues, he is given the names of some celebrities who have “used” the program. Michael Jackson and Paul Newman come into play. This again gives the reader the feeling that he is being given more clues, but in fact, he is no closer to guessing the secret than he was after reading the headline.

Later he is given some relevant details. He learns, for example, that “Chaffee Royalty Programs” trade directly on the stock exchange and that he can get in anytime he likes.

You can see this use of “clues” in all the copy we’ve reviewed. These sorts of clues give the prospect the feeling that he is getting closer to discovering the secret. The copywriter knows he won’t, but he continues to put down these clues like bread crumbs leading him forward through the sales copy.

How Do You Create the Secret?

There are two ways to create a secret headline. The first is to find a secret already in the product. The second way is to take one of its benefits and neologize or transubstantiate it into a secret — that is, to take something familiar and rename it and reposition it so it seems new and secret.

Let’s say you were asked to write copy about a natural supplement with eight ingredients. You might decide to lead with the one that was relatively unknown. By focusing the copy on that unusual ingredient the prospect hasn’t heard of before, you intrigue him. And at the same time, you solve the problem of his thinking, “Oh, I’ve tried that before. It doesn’t work for me.”

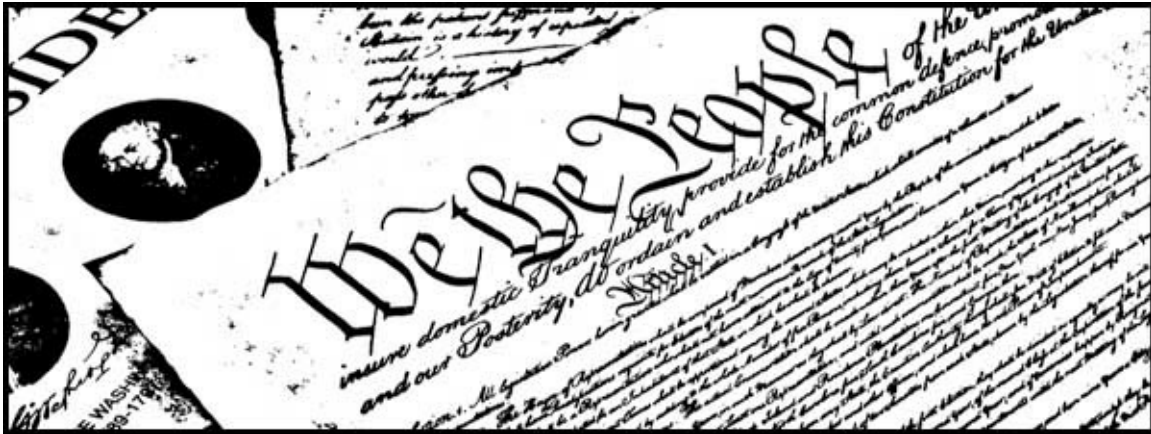
In taking this first approach, make a list of all the qualities, characteristics, and components of the product and ask yourself which, if any of these, is not well-known. Then, decide if the benefit provided by an unusual or unfamiliar quality, characteristic, or component is enough to drive the lead. If it is, you have a good secret to start your promotion with.

When the qualities and characteristics of the product are all well-known, then you can “reinvent” the product by giving it a new name (neologizing or transubstantiating). You have seen five examples of how that is done in this chapter.

These are the basic rules for writing strong Secret Leads. Find something about the product that your customer doesn’t know (or describe something he does know in a new way). Then, tease the prospect with that unusual aspect starting from the headline. Continue to provide teasing “clues” along the way, but be sure that you do not disclose the secret until the prospect is emotionally ready to buy the product.

The Secret Lead is relatively easy to master. It is a simple tool ... but a powerful one. Adding it to your repertoire will greatly increase your power as a copywriter. If you follow the rules!

You Won't Read This Anywhere Else But Here: The Proclamation Lead



“Boldness be my friend.”
— William Shakespeare

As far as we know, no one else has ever categorized this kind of lead.

And yet, not only could you find it extremely powerful in the right instance, but there are many examples of the **Proclamation Lead** both in advertising and in persuasive editorial literature. In fact, they are a very common way to begin a rhetorical speech.

When we first discussed the idea of making Proclamation Leads their own special category, we had different ideas about what to call them. “Emotionally-compelling sentences” was the term we originally discussed. But, then we debated whether all leads are emotionally compelling and whether that might confuse readers.

We also tossed around the terms “declarations” and “pronouncements.” We finally settled on “proclamations” because we felt the word connoted the energy inherent in these emotionally-compelling statements.

Whatever you call them, they are a type of lead distinct from the other five covered in this book. They are first and foremost assertions — sometimes they are statements of fact, other times they are statements of opinion, and still other times they are statements about what might be true now or in the future.

But in all cases, they startle, intrigue, and tempt. This is where they get their great power.

So, if you are looking for a definition for a Proclamation Lead, here is one that will do:

A well-constructed Proclamation Lead begins with an emotionally-compelling statement, usually in the form of the headline. And then, in the copy that follows, the reader is given information that demonstrates the validity of the implicit promise made.

One of the things we’ve been talking about in this book is the concept of directness and indirectness. We have made the point that some lead types — Offer Leads, Promise Leads, and Invitation-type — are

direct in the sense that the reader is very much aware he is reading sales copy. Indirect leads — stories and secrets — distract the reader from that recognition. Done well, the reader temporarily forgets he is reading an advertisement and gives the same attention and suspension of disbelief that he would give to a novel or movie.

The Proclamation Lead, though very simple, is primarily indirect. It is indirect because it distracts the reader from the sale by forcing him to pay attention to the point suggested by the proclamation, without revealing exactly how it will lead to the essential claims of the actual sale.

Good Proclamation Leads read like newspaper stories — tabloid newspapers sometimes, but newspaper stories nonetheless. The target reader’s rational brain might realize he is reading a sales pitch, but his emotional brain is so taken by the secret and the story that he suspends disbelief and reads on with eager anticipation.

And that, as you already know, is the secret of effective indirect leads. They “borrow” the emotional framework of other communication forms — stories and secrets to name two — and use that to “sell” the reader emotionally before the sales pitch becomes obvious and direct.

Because Proclamation Leads are primarily indirect, you’ll find they share a lot of similarities with good secret-driven, story, and other indirect leads. Here are some ways in which they’re similar:

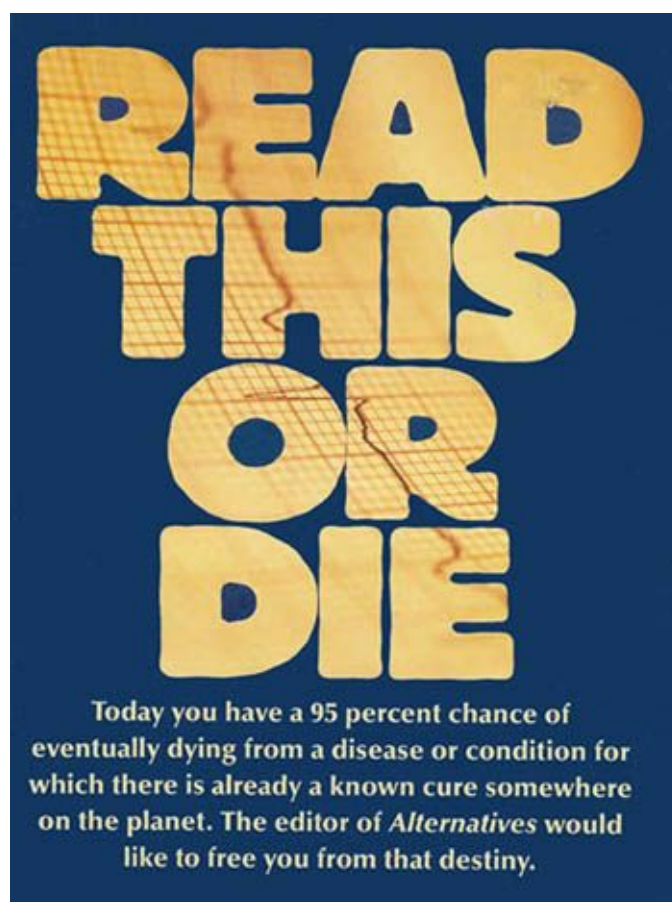
- Because it’s more indirect, the Proclamation Lead gets a lot of its strength from taking the reader by complete surprise. It must be relevant, but it has to be something almost pushing the envelope of the incredible. The reason for this is that ordinary statements are too easy to pass over. To get the reader to pay attention to your Proclamation Lead, you must hook him with the remarkable.

- Like the Secret Lead, the skillful copywriter will not reveal the product’s USP until he has finished proving the proclamation. The proclamation itself is very strong and irresistible. The goal is raising curiosity in an intense and relevant way. What he wants first is proof that justifies his curiosity, and only then will he search for a link to the promises also made or implied in the lead.

- Like the Story Lead, the Proclamation Lead must be concise and engaging. This is why you’ll often find Proclamation Leads “proven” using anecdotes or detailed stories — because these can help you vividly show the proclamation describes something real in just a few words.

- Like all good leads, the more specific you can be with your proclamation usually the better. There’s no better shortcut to real credibility than specific detail. And likewise, as with all the leads in this book, the Proclamation Lead must lead ultimately to some kind of big claim or promise that’s relevant to the reader.

Let’s take a look at the lead in one of the most successful sales letters ever written so you can see how these rules apply. The following example is “report-a-log” promotion that sold a health product ...



Useful, arresting, and on-point: What you see is the cover to a “report-a-log,” a sales piece in the form of a paperback book. The first phrase — Read This Or Die — is obviously a title. But, it is not like many titles the reader might have read before. We can think of only one: Abbie Hoffman’s 1970 bestselling counter-culture manifesto, *Steal This Book*.

This statement is meant to arrest the reader’s attention. It certainly does that. Imagine seeing it on a bookstand. Then, imagine reading the subhead and learning that you have a 95% chance of dying from a curable disease.

Do you think you would be startled? Do you think you would be incredulous? Of course you would. And, the copywriter who wrote this headline was very much aware of that.

But, the job of a good Proclamation Lead is not just to startle, but also to excite and to tempt. And this headline accomplishes both those important goals by a few simple words: “for which there is already a known cure somewhere on the planet.” This gets the reader thinking, “Gee, if this statement (about having a 95% chance of dying from a curable disease) is really true, I better find out more about this.”

The target reader (someone who buys information about health) is compelled to read on. He is reading for a specific purpose — to find out if the claims made on the cover are valid. And, if they are, to discover something about the “known cures.”

Here is the next page of copy:

An Announcement from Mountain Home Publishing, Publisher of *Alternatives*

After 6,000 years of recorded human history, we are finally able to issue this statement:

The worldwide medical community has found solutions for all of the primary diseases and disorders of our time.

Until now, the healing arts have always lagged behind the onslaught of plagues and chronic illness.

But as of today, at the start of the 7th millennium, we at last have remedies, successful treatments, or outright cures for every one of the leading maladies of our modern world.

What's interesting here is that the copy continues with another proclamation: That after 6,000 years, the medical community has remedies for every known disease. This is effective because it repeats the emotional work that was done on the cover. The text, the reader realizes, is not backing away from the claim made on the cover. If anything, they are repeating it more strongly.

Let's read on:

This does not mean, of course, that every known disease will quickly vanish from the face of the earth. But, it does mean that some segment of the medical community in some nation now has an answer — or the answer — to virtually every common health problem.

Actually, this claim could have been made 15 years ago. But, it would have required stretching the definition of “the medical community” to include a lot of practitioners of traditional folk medicine. Today, however, research laboratories have put many thousands of folk remedies under their microscopes, and hundreds of long-treasured ethnic remedies have been refined, polished up, and upgraded from “ancient lore” to “scientific fact.”

Do you see what the copywriter is doing here? He's dealing with possible objections the target reader might have (“Is this based on science?”) while sticking strongly to the startling claim made on the front page. He knows that the success of this lead will depend on the reader feeling like he is learning something useful and new to him. It gets him excited. He wants it to be true!

Let's read on:

The *Journal of Alternatives* exists to bring together all these newly-discovered treatment modalities and deliver them to you — in formats that enable you (or your patients) to use them very easily.

We are a network of 150,000 rugged individualists, a highly educated and sophisticated society of health experts and perpetual students. About one-fourth of us are doctors and other health professionals.

Now the reader is introduced to the product — the *Journal of Alternatives*, which he finds has 150,000 members. This extra bit of detail makes him feel more comfortable.

Let's continue reading.

The purpose of this bulletin is to cordially invite you to become one of us. Please see our invitation on the last page.

Now, this is interesting. The copywriter is extending an invitation to the reader. The invitation is a direct technique. The reader knows now that he is being sold something, but the invitation format makes it feel personal and exclusive.

This is, as you have already learned, a very common practice in writing leads. You might begin strongly with one type of lead (in this case, a proclamation) but once the emotional hook is set in, you can use more direct leads to move your reader along.

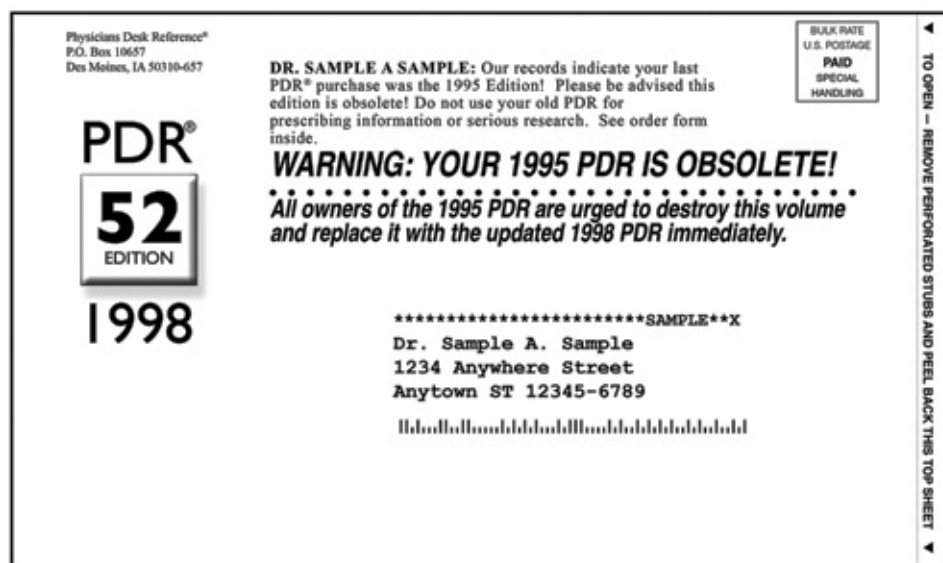
Increasing detail: Jim Rutz, the copywriter who wrote this masterpiece, hints that the reader will learn more about saving himself from dying right from the beginning. But, as he continues through the

copy, he provides increasing details about the nature of the remarkable, scientifically-proven cures.

As we've said, Proclamation Leads typically have an implicit promise. "Read This Or Die!" — an imperative — implies that the reader will be able to avoid some terrible, life-threatening calamity if he reads on.

Proclamation Leads are used most often for selling consumer-based products, usually to prospects that aren't aware of the product. But, that's not always the case.

Let's take a look at another very successful Proclamation Lead taken from the Business-to-Business niche where the prospects — doctors in this case — are very aware of the product:



The copy that jumps out at you — "Warning: Your 1995 PDR is Obsolete" — is a declarative statement.

You may not know what a PDR is, but the prospects who received this promotion did. The PDR is the Physicians' Desk Reference. It is one of the first books interns buy and is a consistent part of all physicians' libraries.

If you were a health professional, you would be very concerned to hear the book you've been using to make diagnoses is obsolete. It would arrest your attention. It would cause you to worry. And, it would cause you to think that maybe you should replace the one you have with the newer version. The newer, updated PDR is the promise.

Can you see how much work has been done so far? In about 50 words of envelope copy, Master Copywriter Bob Bly grabbed attention, scared the prospect, and then gave him a solution for the problem he may not have known he had!

That's the efficiency of a Proclamation Lead.

Later in this letter, Bly did something so clever we had to show it to you. Take a look at this sticker that he included:

NOTICE:

***Please place this sticker on your old PDR
to alert readers that it is
out-of-date and should not be used for
prescribing information or serious research.***

WARNING!

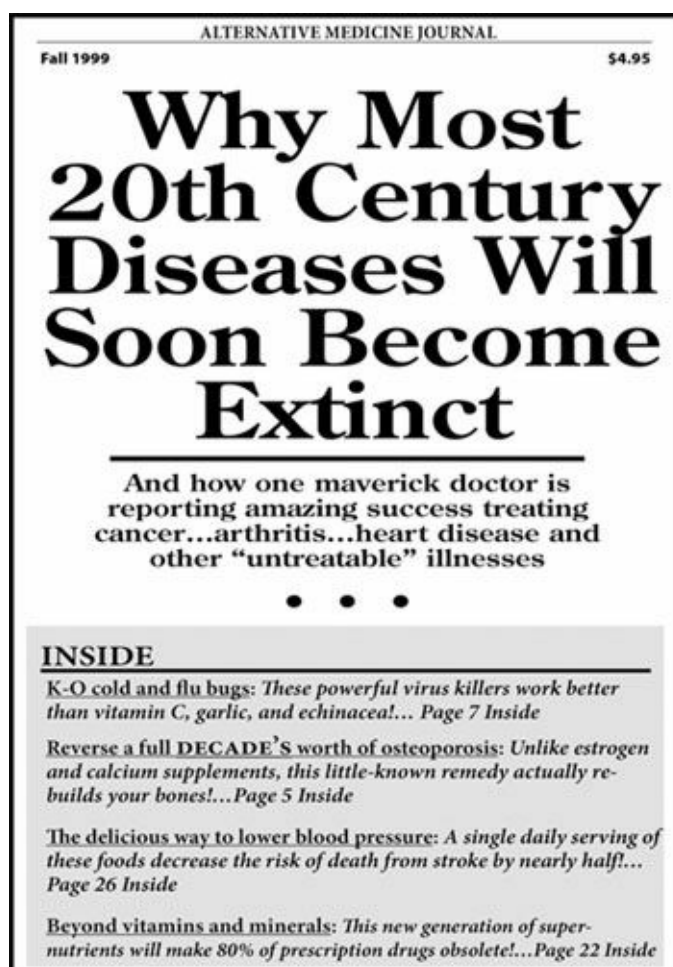
***This edition of the PDR is out-of-date.
Do not use this book for prescribing
Information!***

Talk about ratcheting up the core emotion!

In this clever bit of copy, Bly has transformed “outdated” into something that seems downright dangerous. This is the kind of cleverness that can arise when you have figured out a strong Proclamation Lead.

In selling political, environmental, health, and financial ideas, Master Copywriters often turn to a special form of a proclamation — the prediction — to achieve the desired emotional effects.

Here’s one that ran in the late summer of 1999. The product was a monthly subscription newsletter from the famous Dr. Robert Atkins.



This title copy — “Why Most 20th Century Medicine Will Soon Become Extinct” — is certainly arresting. The reader is surprised by it. How could an entire century of medical knowledge suddenly become extinct?

The reader wants to know the answer. He reads the subhead and finds out that a “maverick doctor is reporting amazing success treating cancer, arthritis, heart disease, and other ‘untreatable’ diseases.”

And, the specificity of “maverick” and the diseases mentioned gives the lead just enough detail to make the reader believe that the book might contain some very interesting and useful information.

That same subhead is also an implied promise: That the reader will discover new, presumably 21st century remedies that might make him healthier and help him avoid deadly diseases.

Beneath the subhead, there are bullets that indicate particular benefits the reader will derive from opening the book and reading through it.

Let’s look at another example of a Proclamation Lead that also hinges on a prediction.

This one appeared in the summer of 2006, when many people worried whether real estate prices, stocks, and the world economy had hit a peak.

One European economist, Dr. Kurt Richebacher, offered sophisticated research that proved this was the case.

But, his argument was complex and the copywriter knew he had to find a way to simplify it. The lead you see here was his solution.

It begins with a super head in a flag: “Countdown to Crisis!”

That sets the tone and piques the reader’s interest. Then, the main headline predicts “Three Shocking Events will wipe out millions of American investors.” And, it will happen by a specific date: December

COUNTDOWN TO CRISIS!
**“Three Shocking Events
will wipe out *millions* of
American investors by
Dec. 31, 2006...**

"One of the world's most famous market
analysts just revealed his *two favorite 'wealth
fortress' investments* for protecting his - and
your - money...

"And I can give you both those
recommendations - plus 12 months more of his
insightful newsletter - FREE."

(See below)...

Dear Forward-Looking Reader,

One of the smartest - and richest - investors I
know says he will *NOT* buy any stocks this year.

Not a single one. He won't buy gold, either.

For the first time,
the world's most elite
and unique investment
research circle in the

Or bonds or mutual funds.
And real estate?

Not on your life.

Linking a predicted event to a specific date is a proven technique for increasing credibility. The reader wonders, “What three events could have such a great impact by the end of the year?” In asking that question, the reader has already half-accepted the veracity of the prediction. He is on a hunt now to find out what these events could be and how the writer knows they will take place by December 31st.

The copy that follows the headline lets the reader know that this prediction is coming from someone credible: “one of the world’s most famous market analysts.” And, a moment later, he discovers that this same authority has just made two recommendations that will protect him from this predicted set of disasters.

As we said about Proclamation Leads in general, in a prediction-based lead, once an emotionally-compelling statement (in the form of a prediction) has hooked the reader, the copy can then start using some of the techniques that work in other types of leads.

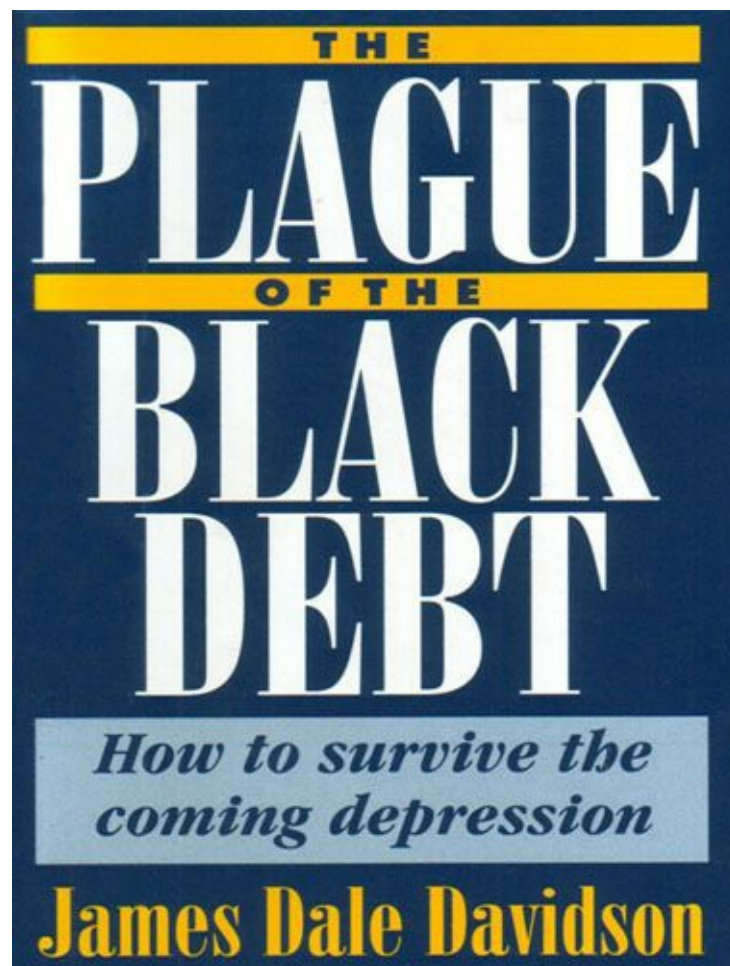
For instance, in this example, you can also see the pull of a secret (actually five secrets: three events and two recommendations) and a large promise. The pull being that these recommendations will protect the reader.

A story element then follows: “One of the smartest and richest investors I know says he will not buy any stocks or gold or bonds this year.” The reader is very drawn in at this point. He feels compelled to continue reading until he’s found out just what these events are and what sort of unusual investments will save him.

Here’s another Proclamation Lead, also in the form of a prediction ...

In the early 1990s, the U.S. had just emerged from a banking crisis. We had just fought a costly war. And, our government had launched into a spending spree. People were worried and this promotion — in

the form of a small “bookalog” — capitalized on that fear.



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As you can see, it begins with a single, massive prediction: That there was going to be a depression. And, that depression was caused by debt, something people were talking about then (just as they are now).

The cover copy is not precisely a declarative statement, but it is close enough. It asserts a prediction, identifies a problem, and then offers the solution to that problem.

Again, this is a very efficient way to stir up emotions: in this case, fear and hope.

Notice how it was done: through a metaphor. The copywriter, Lee Euler, decided to compare a stock market crash (which might have seemed a bit abstract) to something that they could visualize more easily: a plague.

The Table of Contents deepened the boldness of the prediction, with chapter teasers that fleshed out the seriousness of the threats and identified solutions.

This promotion mailed over seven million times and brought in over 170,000 orders. And, the bookalog format became a much-copied industry standard.

More recently, another Master Copywriter, Mike Palmer (with whom Michael Masterson has also written a book about copywriting), wrote a similar promotion using another big prediction: the end of America.

So far, this promotion has already brought in 200,000 subscribers and may well bring in 300,000 more

before it loses steam. If so, it will be the single most successful promotion selling an investment newsletter and perhaps the second most successful promotion in investment publishing history, after *The Wall Street Journal's* famous “tale of two young men” Story Lead.

Okay, you’ve had a chance to study Proclamation Leads that use both strong declarative statements and predictions. And, we’ve talked about the other elements of successful Proclamation Leads. Now, let’s review some “rules” ...

Rule # 1: Make the Proclamation Bold, Not Reasonable

To be effective, Proclamation Leads must be big and bold. They must not only grab attention, but also stir up thoughts and excite emotions. Take a look at all the examples in this chapter. One thing they all have in common: They are all big and bold and most of them are contrary to the point of being startling.

You won’t break any marketing records by writing sensible Proclamation Leads. Being sensible is not your job. Not, at least, in the lead.

Rule # 2: Make a Promise

To be effective, all leads must make or at least imply a promise. And, the Proclamation Lead is no exception, even though its’ approach is that much more indirect. In the *Read This Or Die* promo, the promise is that the reader could find a cure inside for a disease that conventional medicine has yet to overcome. The reader himself immediately inverts the message to be, “If I read this, I won’t die.”

This is typical for most Proclamation Leads to only hint at solutions. If the promise isn’t implicit in the headline, you’ll find it somewhere in the subhead. Even the rest of the lead will spend the bulk of the time expanding on the proclamation first and only hinting at the solution.

Remember, however, that you’ll eventually have to make the promise of the sales pitch much more concrete. This begins when the reader is emotionally committed to reading the copy and intensifies as you work your way through the proof. You’ll want to repeat the promise in different ways and make it more concrete as you move along, giving the reader a chance to imagine enjoying the benefit.

Rule # 3: The Subject Must Be Relevant

Even though Proclamation Leads gain a lot of impact by saying something unexpected, they still must be relevant in the sense that they must address something the prospect cares about. They also must be relevant in the sense that the promise must be something the prospect desires.

Rule # 4: Return to the Proclamation at the Close

Be sure to go back and underscore the main theme of the proclamation in any sales premiums you offer and in the wording of the guarantee. You can even connect the guarantee to the proclamation: “If you’re not happy with the product or what I’m telling you simply doesn’t play out the way I’ve described, you can send in for a full refund ... ”

One Last Secret

Proclamation Leads, more than any other lead, depend on efficiency for their success. Usually all the power is contained in a single declarative sentence. Since it is just one sentence, you might think that

Proclamation Leads would be easy to write. In fact, they can't really be *written* at all. They have to be found.

Great Proclamation Leads almost always come from research. The cures discussed in *Read This Or Die* or the *Three Shocking Events* were not conjured up out of thin air. They came after weeks of research — poring over reams of documents and medical reports. There were many impressive studies cited in the promos, several of which contributed to the headline and lead ideas. Even though it's the bold headline that strikes the reader first, you can tell that it wouldn't have been possible without the research that preceded it.

Likewise with the example of *The Plague of the Black Debt*. At the time it was written, the growing U.S. national debt was already a major concern. But, simply saying that wasn't enough. So, Lee Euler dug deep into his research until he found the proof that substantiated the proclamation. In his case, it was a series of three charts that showed mounting debt could lead to a financial breakdown.

And that was how he began the lead copy that followed the headline, with an opening chapter to his promotional bookalog that he titled “Three Little Charts and the Truth.” The rest of the lead went on to show how dangerous this debt could be, before hinting that there were ways for investors to protect themselves.

You'll see this over and over again with this kind of lead especially. The trick is to stay alert for “amazing” facts as you are doing your reading. When you find something that strikes you as remarkable, write it down, and go back to it later. It might just be *the* fact you need to create a great Proclamation Lead.

The Tale of the \$2 Billion Sales Letter



“Those who tell the stories rule the world.”

— Plato

It was in the winter of 1983. I was in the library. If I could get my hands on it, I’d meet my deadline and my reputation would be saved.

Legendary copywriter Don Hauptman had mentioned it to me in passing.

“It is one of the most successful sales letters ever written,” he said. “But it had a lead that was very unconventional at the time.”

He assumed I was familiar with it. If I’d had more confidence, I would have admitted I’d never heard about it. But I pretended I had, and he gave me a brief history of its success.

When Don told me about this letter — written by Martin Conroy — it had been a control for six years — quite an accomplishment for any piece of copywriting. But, it went on to hold that honor for a total of 28 years and generated an estimated 2 BILLION dollars in revenue.

I made a mental note to find and study it. If Don Hauptman was recommending it, I knew it was something worthy of my attention. But, those were the pre-Internet days and I had no easy way to locate it. So, I forgot about it until almost two years later. I was on a deadline and stuck on the lead. I’d tried a half-dozen but none of them were good enough to show my boss. I had followed my first great success with a clunker. If the next one wasn’t good, he would write that first one off as beginner’s luck. But, if I hit another home run with this one, I would be on the fast track. I could feel it.

Don had told me enough about the headline to know it was the model I needed. So, I called up the few copywriters I knew, but they had no copies. They, too, had heard about it, but none could tell me where to find it.

Then, my wife suggested I try the Library of Congress. “If it was such a big thing, I’m sure somebody wrote about it. There’s got to be a book or magazine article that has it.” It was my only hope. My deadline was fast approaching. So, I drove through a near hurricane to get there and arrived less than an hour

before closing.

I spent the first half-hour looking through the periodical index. But, I found nothing. A voice came over the sound system warning that the library would be closed soon. Despite my stubborn inclination never to ask anybody for anything, I walked up to the lady at the reference desk and begged her to help me. For twenty minutes, she dug but could find nothing either. Then, just as the final warning to leave was called, she located it. She helped me make a quick copy and, wanting to kiss her, I thanked her profusely and hurried home.

It was just what I needed. The first example of a **Story Lead** I had ever seen.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL
The daily diary of the American Dream
22 Cortland Street/New York, New York 10007

Dear Reader;

On a beautiful late spring afternoon, twenty-five years ago, two young men graduated from the same college. They were very much alike, these two young men. Both had been better than average students, both were personable and both—as young college graduates—were filled with ambitious dreams for the future.

Recently, these men returned to their college for their 25th reunion.

They were still very much alike. Both were happily married. Both had three children. And both, it turned out, had gone to work for the same Midwestern manufacturing company after graduation, and were still there.

But there was a difference. One was manager of a small department of that company. The other was its president.

What Made The Difference

Have you ever wondered, as I have, what makes this kind of difference in people's lives? It isn't native intelligence or talent or dedication. It isn't that one person wants success and the other doesn't.

The difference lies in what each person knows and how he or she makes use of that knowledge.

And that is why I am writing to you and to people like you about The Wall Street Journal. For that is the whole purpose of The Journal: To give its readers knowledge—knowledge that they can use in business.

Before reading it, I thought all sales letters should begin with a promise or an offer or an invitation. My first big success — the one that got my boss to wonder if I might “have it,” was an invitation letter. But the next one, a promise offer, didn't do so well. Just looking at this famous ad, I could see it had the power that my package needed.

Take another look at this lead. It is a very short story about two people who start out their careers with equal prospects, but then meet 25 years later at a reunion. One of them is very successful and the other is not. The reader wants to know what happened. That is the hook.

As you can see, there is a promise embedded in this little story. If the reader finds out how this one young man became so successful, he can apply that strategy to his own life and enjoy success, too.

Story Leads always contain a promise. But, they are much less direct than promise offers. The reader may know that he is reading an advertisement, but if the story is well-told, he soon forgets about that and gets emotionally involved in the story itself.

In this chapter, we are going to talk about Story Leads, which I contend are perhaps the most powerful type of lead. And, I will explain why. And then, I will show you how a good Story Lead is constructed.

Let's begin by taking a look at an ad that predated *The Wall Street Journal* ad by 51 years. I'm talking

[illegible]

They laughed when I sat down at the piano ...
But when I started to play!

One inevitable solution

You can see the shock and disbelief on the faces of those who were laughing. Our hero has begun

playing, and the music is flowing like wine. Men grow pale with admiration and jealousy. Women glow in appreciation.

And then the thought hits you: “Wouldn’t it be wonderful if *I* could play the piano?”

Based on Caples’ headline alone, the reader of this ad is already half-persuaded to sign up for the course it is selling. This is an astonishing amount of work to get done with 15 simple words.

What’s going on here?

I said this about the Rule of One, “Write about only one thing at a time. Because one good idea, clearly and convincingly presented, is better than a dozen so-so ideas strung together.”

Caples’ headline is a beautiful example of that. Had he taken the salad bowl approach — so popular with the whippersnappers who write copy today — it might have read as follows:

Now You Can Learn to Play the Piano Quickly and Easily!

After years of research, musicologist discovers the world’s most efficient method for teaching the piano.

Using this unique new program, you can master the piano in less than a year!

You will amaze your friends and neighbors! Some may even be shocked at how well you can play!

Plus, you can earn extra income on the weekends!

This headline doesn’t have nearly the force of the original because it has too much going on. Too many unnecessary details, too many unrelated emotions, and too many damn words!

Another reason Caples’ headline is so strong is because, as I pointed out, it tells a story. Of all the ways to get your readers emotionally involved in your copy, nothing works better and more consistently than the Story Lead.

Story Leads are not as common as Promise or Offer Leads, but if you look at the greatest ads in history, they are surprisingly common. In the early 2000s, Raphael Marketing compiled a list of 101 of the best print advertising headlines ever written. As a group, these ads sold hundreds of millions of dollars’ worth of products and services. (That would be tens of billions of dollars today.)

While most of the actual ads are “lost to history,” a quick examination shows that a good 35% of the headlines are story-based. There’s a good reason that number is so high.

Stories are a very primal way of communicating. Long before the printing press was invented, human beings used stories to convey important cultural lessons to their offspring. All the ancient pre-literate societies had stories — stories of how the world was formed and how they became the chosen people.

The *Iliad and the Odyssey* and *Beowulf* were stories that inspired and educated their respective cultures. Some of those stories contained non-narrative elements (lists, commandments, etc.), but these were all wrapped in stories.

What is the Bible — Old Testament and New — if not a collection of stories?

Why are stories so much a part of all cultures? The main reason is that they can convey information in a way that is easy to remember. They can convey both a quantity of information and a quality of information that other forms of communication cannot.

There are schools of thinking that argue that our brains are wired to respond to stories. It may be that

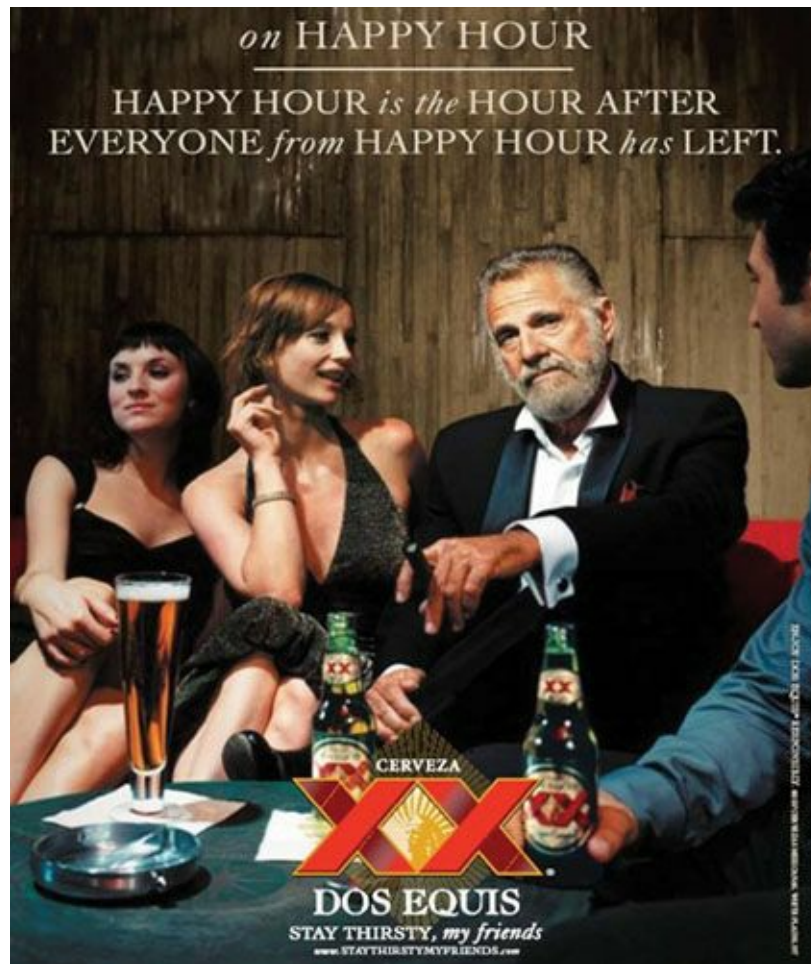
stories are in and of themselves more compelling.

Now with these points in mind, let's look at another extremely successful ad with a Story Lead.

The Man in the Hathaway Shirt

Have you seen The Most Interesting Man in the World?

I'm referring to the TV commercials for Dos Equis beer. They star a rugged-looking, silver-haired man who is always surrounded by beautiful women.



In one version of the commercial, he arm-wrestles a Third World General and releases a grizzly bear from a trap. In another, the narrator relates that even his enemies list him as their emergency contact and that the police often question him just because they find him interesting.

If you are a student of advertising, you know this is a knockoff of David Ogilvy's famous ad campaign: The Man in the Hathaway Shirt.

In brief: It was 1951. Ellerton Jette, a shirtmaker from Waterville, Maine, wanted to grow his little business into a national brand, but he didn't have much money. He had heard about the advertising prowess of David Ogilvy. So, he booked a meeting with him.

"I have an advertising budget of only \$30,000," he told Ogilvy. "And I know that's much less than you normally work with. But, I believe you can make me into a big client of yours if you take on the job."

If he'd stopped there, Ogilvy would have thrown him out of the office. But then he said something that sold the great salesman.

He said, "If you do take on the job, Mr. Ogilvy, I promise you this. No matter how big my company gets, I will never fire you. And, I will never change a word of your copy."

There is a big lesson here. So, let's stop for a moment and talk about it.


What Ellerton Jette did was a little bit of genius. In two short sentences, he changed the mind of one of the most powerful men in the world of advertising. At the same moment, he made himself a very rich man.

Jette's \$30,000 budget might have put \$3,000 in Ogilvy's pocket. Though it was a paltry sum then and a mere pittance now, at least it was something. But, what really clinched the deal were the two promises Jette made.

Going into the meeting, Jette knew he had one chance to forge a relationship with Ogilvy. He somehow understood that Ogilvy, as successful as he was, had two big problems. He worried that his biggest clients would walk away from him. And, he hated it when his clients screwed with his copy. So, instead of thinking only of his own goals, Jette took the time to figure out how he could offer Ogilvy something that would be of immense value to him.

When Jette made his two promises, Ogilvy realized that he was talking to a businessman who would eventually become a partner. He could see that Jette was a man of good faith who would let Ogilvy be in charge of his marketing. And, that he would reward Ogilvy with a lifetime of loyalty.

Now, let's get back to the story of the Hathaway shirt ad ...



The man in the Hathaway shirt

AMERICAN MEN are beginning to realize that it is ridiculous to buy good suits and then spoil the effect by wearing an ordinary, mass-produced shirt. Hence the growing popularity of Hathaway shirts, which are in a class by themselves.

HATHAWAY shirts are infinitely longer — a matter of years. They make you look younger and more distinguished, because of the subtle way Hathaway cut collars. The whole shirt is tailored more generously, and is therefore more comfortable. The collars are longer, and stay in your trousers. The buttons are mother-of-pearl. Even the stitching has an unobtrusive elegance about it.

After all, HATHAWAY make their shirts of remarkable fabric, collected from the four corners of the earth — Virella, and Sherra, from England, woaden suffins from Scotland, Sea Island cotton from the West Indies, hand-woven madras from India, broadcloth from Manchester, linen buttons from Paris, hand-blackened silk from England, exclusive cottons from the best weavers in America. You will get a

great deal of quiet satisfaction out of wearing shirts which are in such impeccable taste.

HATHAWAY shirts are made by a small company of dedicated craftsmen in the little town of Waterville, Maine. They have been at it, man and boy, for one hundred and twenty years.

At better stores everywhere, or write C. F. HATHAWAY, Waterville, Maine. For the name of your nearest store. In New York, telephone OX 7-5566. Prices from \$1.95 to \$10.00.

After accepting Jette's offer, Ogilvy spent days doing in-depth research on Jette's client base. He came up with dozens of ideas. The one he settled on was a campaign built around the image of a distinguished man in a romantic location dressed in a Hathaway shirt. He selected a model that looked like William Faulkner and booked the first photo shoot.

On the way to the shoot, he passed a five-and-ten cent store where he bought a few cheap eye patches. At the shoot, he asked the model to wear an eye patch for a few shots.

The moment he saw the photos with the eye patch, he knew.

The Man in the Hathaway Shirt campaign was an instant success. The ads were carried in papers around the country, and were mentioned editorially in *Time*, *Life*, and *Fortune*.

Before long, hosts of imitators appeared. Other companies ran ads featuring eye patches on babies, dogs ... even cows. A cartoon in *The New Yorker* shows three men looking into the display window of a shirt store. In the second panel, they're coming out of the store, with eye patches on.

Ogilvy got the idea for the patch, he said, from a photo of Ambassador Lewis Douglas, who had injured his eye while fishing in England. But, he got the idea itself — the idea of this aristocratic man with a romantic life — from the James Thurber story “The Secret Life of Walter Mitty.” (Actually, Kenneth Roman pointed out in *The King of Madison Avenue*, it could have been from the secret life of David Ogilvy. As a young executive, Ogilvy was prone to wearing capes and bow ties while everyone else was in grey flannel suits.)

Of course, it wasn't just the eye patch that made the ads work. It was the combination of the model, the situation he was in, and the copy itself.

And the copy was brilliant. Here's the first line of the first ad:

“The melancholy disciples of Thorstein Veblen would have despised this shirt.”

Most readers of the ad had no idea who Thorstein Veblen was. But, they got the idea. Veblen was some sort of snobby aristocratic. By posing a handsome, silver-haired model with an eye patch in a Hathaway shirt and putting that line underneath the photo, Ogilvy struck a chord in the American imagination. We all hate aristocrats, but we'd like to be one.

There was another brilliant thing about the ad. Putting the model in a romantic location gave the pitch a fictional element. It had “story appeal,” as Ogilvy put it.

Ogilvy said he discovered the concept of story appeal in a book by Harold Rudolph, a former ad agency research director. This was the first time, Roman says in his book, “that shirt advertising focused as much on the man wearing the shirt as on the shirt itself.”

And now, back to *The Most Interesting Man in the World* ...

I am a fan of these Dos Equis commercials. I like them because they are a salute to David Ogilvy and because they successfully replicate the key elements in Ogilvy's ads for the Hathaway shirt. They have the handsome, silver-haired model. They have the eye patch. And, they have the anti-aristocrat touch. (The product is beer, after all.)

They also have the romance and the story. Each new edition of the commercial is another episode in this most interesting man's life.

They fall short only in one respect. They don't do a great job of equating the product with the concept.

When I remember a Dos Equis ad, I remember the actor's face. I remember the pretty girls in the background. I'm aware that he is a man that women find irresistible. And, that when he drinks, he drinks ... Wait a minute. What does he drink?

There's the rub.

We find out that The Most Interesting Man in the World drinks Dos Equis. But, he could just as well drink Pabst Blue Ribbon. The creative people behind this very good ad campaign get a big demerit for that. Ogilvy, on the other hand, put the product's name in the headline. The fact that his man was wearing a

Hathaway shirt was integral to the story.

Grabbing the prospect's attention with an entertaining story or idea or photo is essential for any sort of advertising campaign. But, you have to do more than that. You have to sell the product. And to do that, you must link the initial sentiment created in the headline with the final emotion needed to close the sale at the end. (But, beware. This does *not* mean you should put the name of the product in your headline and lead. This is often a mistake to do.)

In AWAI's *Accelerated Program for Six-Figure Copywriting*, I call this "The Golden Thread." It's pretty simple. The product is at one end of the thread. The prospect's heart is at the other end. Every element of the copy must be connected to the product as well as to the prospect. And, the connection must be taut. If the thread goes slack, even for a second, you lose the sale.

The Power of a Story

Of the six archetypal lead types discussed in this book, there is none more powerful than the story.

Stories work because they allow the listener/reader to experience some event in a very visceral way. You hear a story about a shirtmaker who dreams of creating a national brand. You identify with him and his challenge. You feel his frustration. You comprehend the audacity of his goal. And, then you live through — in your imagination — his efforts and his eventual success.

Before you have even finished the story, you have internalized some basic ideas. These ideas "feel" compelling to you because you "lived" through them. They are not simply statements you have been asked to accept.

Every Master Copywriter understands the fundamental ambivalence of the prospect: He wants to buy, but he doesn't want to be sold.

When you employ a direct lead such as an Offer or Invitation, Promise, or Problem-Solution, the prospect recognizes you are trying to sell him something. Since he doesn't want to be sold, he will emotionally resist the sale, even as he feels it tugging at his heartstrings.

With indirect leads, the prospect is not so aware of the selling. When he reads a Secret Lead, he's compelled to read on because he wants to discover the secret. The same is true with the compelling statement or prediction of the Proclamation Lead. And it is true, most of all, with the Story Lead.

If the story is told well, the prospect forgets — almost immediately — that he's reading an advertisement. And thus he forgets, at least for the moment, that he is being sold. His emotions are tied up in the story itself. There is a problem and he wants to know how it will be resolved. He will read it with the same emotional openness he has when he reads a novel or watches a movie. His "advertising" defenses are down. Way down. This is a *huge* advantage for the copywriter.

As John Forde has to say about it:

"I can think of a lot of people who balk at big promises. I can think of plenty more who couldn't care less about a bulleted list of shocking statistics. But, I can't think of a single person who can resist a good story. Can you? "Everybody loves a good story.

"As a way to communicate, nothing feels more natural.

"So, doesn't it make sense that when someone says, 'Let me tell you a story ...' you perk up and listen?

“There’s no better way to melt resistance. Of course, if you don’t tell the story well, you can still lose the reader. And, telling the right stories well isn’t always easy.

“But get it right, and a Story Lead lets you sneak into the psyche sideways, like no other lead can, delivering anecdotal proof and promises ... and a setup for the rest of your pitch ... long before the reader even realizes what you’re doing.”

Caples’ piano ad was an instant hit, selling thousands of correspondence courses. Many call it the most successful ad of the 20th century.

And, the structure of his classic headline has been “borrowed” time and again by other copywriters. You may have seen these (thanks to Don Hauptman for these examples):

They grinned when the waiter spoke to me in French ...

But their laughter changed to amazement at my reply.

They laughed when I sent away for free color film ...

But now my friends are all sending away, too.

They laughed when I sat down at the computer —

But when I started to use it!

So, what can the modern marketer/copywriter learn about headline writing from Caples’ classic example?

First, the Rule of One: One strong idea/emotion/benefit is better than half a dozen mediocre ones.

Second, the power of the story: There is no stronger way to engage your prospect than with a simple story.

Third, that adhering to the “rules” of good storytelling will produce the greatest effect. That means beginning in the middle with a conflict — expressed or implicit — that affects a protagonist the reader can identify with. And, offering an emotionally-satisfying solution.

You don’t have to use Caples’ words. Just borrow the deeper structure of his headline:

The hero, an ordinary person like your prospect, attempts to do something extraordinary.

People doubt him.

He proves them wrong.

There are countless ways to apply this structure.

If you are selling an investment advisory, for example, you could tell a story about the secret behind how all the wealthiest families in Europe made their fortunes. Like Mike Palmer did in his control promotion for *True Wealth*.

Dear Reader,

Many of the world’s wealthiest families have used this “secret currency” for generations to grow dynasties.

Let me show you just one example ...

Mayer Amschel Rothschild used his knowledge of this investment to launch the largest family fortune the world has ever seen.

Mayer was born in Germany in the middle of the 18th century, and was raised in Frankfurt's ghetto, where the average house held 15 people.

When the boy was 11, a smallpox epidemic swept through the ghetto. It killed both of his parents. This tragedy set up young Mayer to learn the greatest secret of his life.

Or, if you are selling cigars, you could create a story about the perils and excitement of finding the best tobacco.

***15 Rivers to Cross ... and only 7 bridges
Here's how we were able to bring you ...***

THE GRANADA

In spite of bandits, jaguars, baby dinosaurs, and high water ... at a price that will make a happy bandit out of YOU!

I used to think that the only way to have a real adventure was to be an astronaut or something. But that was before my recent trip to the Hidden Valley in Honduras, where the alluvial soil is six feet deep and everybody and his brother carries a six-shooter for bandit insurance.

Maybe you thought I just sit around writing letters to my good customers and wrapping cigar boxes to take to the Post Office. Not so. You don't get the best tobacco settin' at home on your resources. And believe me, you don't always find the comforts of home elsewhere.

Sometimes I wonder why I'm in this business at all — and why I go an over Hell's half-acre to insure my supply of good tobacco. Yet if I didn't go right down to the tobacco farms and check the crops for myself, I'd never be able to offer you the cigars I do. And I certainly would never have found the priceless bales of wrapper I brought back from my last trip to Central America.

Or, if you're trying to get your prospect to donate money to provide shelter for homeless teens, few leads are as powerful as a well-told story such as this Covenant House appeal ...

I'm writing to you from our shelter tonight ...

Dear Friends,

I'm writing to you from our shelter tonight. From the corner, I can see James, just 16, sleeping on a fresh cot we set up in the chapel. Covenant House is full. Every bed is taken. I don't always know how we make room for all these kids, but by the grace of God, tonight we found a way again.

James came to us tonight, exhausted, his eyelids barely able to stay open. He'd been trying to sleep near the restaurant dumpsters, in the bus station, on park benches. He'd rested his head on tables at 24-hour donut shops, under the fluorescent lights, desperate for a safe, quiet place to sleep.

We set up the cot, put on fresh linens, and gave him a new blanket. He was asleep before his head hit the pillow.

James is safe tonight because of people like you who care about kids.

I will end this essay by saying this: You have just read about half a dozen of the most powerful

marketing secrets I know. If you put this essay down and forget about it, you will be making a terrible mistake. Read it at least half a dozen times and think about it. If it doesn't make you a multimillionaire, I'll eat my shirt. Hathaway, of course.

Is that really the end?

Not quite, I forgot to tell you the ending of the story I began with. I used *The Wall Street Journal* ad to create a story of my own. I was selling a product called Executive Productivity. It was a newsletter that told executives how to — well, you know — be more productive.

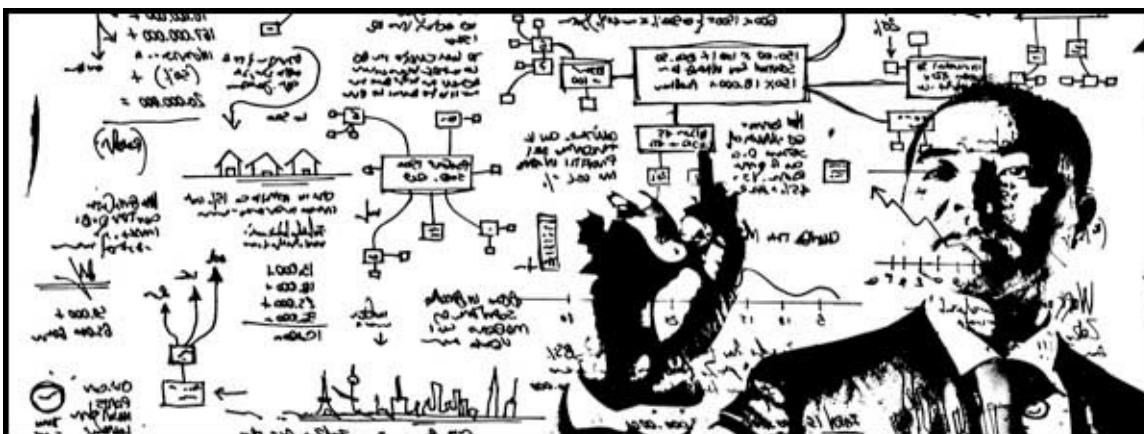
The prior control used a very direct headline: How to Double Your Productivity or something like that. My lead was very different. I wrote a story about my own experience coming to work with my boss. I had taken a job as executive editor of his publications but I simply wasn't up to the job. I was too young and inexperienced. Most of the writers I was editing were twice my age and better writers than I.

I knew that to do a good job I would have to work 24 hours a day. I had a wife and two small babies. How could I get the productivity I needed from myself? I had no idea until I came across an old book at a secondhand store ...

You get the picture. How did my sales letter work? It tripled the response rate of the control and became an unbeatable control for more than five years. Most importantly, it made my boss believe in me ... which later resulted in my becoming his partner.

And, it all began by learning how to tell a story.

How to Make This System Work for You



“Play by the rules, but be ferocious.”

— Phil Knight

Since we first started putting together this system of lead archetypes, we’ve seen it implemented by our own colleagues.

How well has it worked for them?

If their real-world results are any indication — and we’re convinced they are — it’s worked out pretty well.

Copywriter Angela Salerno, for example, had a chance to test two of the six lead types you’ve read about in this book. Not just for the same product, but on the same marketing promotion. And, with an unusual and impressive result.

The product was an investment research service that identified momentum-driven stock trades.

It was a natural, Angela figured, for the kind of Offer Lead type you read about in Chapter 4.

After all, not only did potential subscribers know the trading pro behind the service well, he had an excellent track record. And, the deal available to subscribers couldn’t be beat. So, Angela went with something very direct.

This was her simple headline:

Why We’re Giving You 12 FREE Months of Alexander Green’s *Momentum Alert*

In just the past year, this red-hot service has generated a mind-boggling 3,183% gains.

But according to Alex, that’s nothing compared to the next 12 months. And if you respond today, you can access this research at no charge. No strings attached. Read on for details ...

It did well enough. Sales topped \$1 million. But, here’s where this got interesting. When it came time to update the promotion, a new format was making it possible to reach a much wider audience with the

same offer.

Angela realized not all of the new prospects would know the editor or have reason to trust him yet as a resource. So, she revised the same copy into a less direct Problem-Solution Lead, like those you saw in Chapter 6.

She also moved the offer and mention of the product deeper into her copy and focused instead on the “horrible mistake most investors are making right now” by overlooking these momentum-based trends.

The result?

The new approach combined with the new format turned what was already a million-dollar sales letter into a *\$3 million* letter. Says Angela, “It was by far our bestselling product of the year.”

Karen Reddel, who heads up a nutritional supplement company we work with closely, tells a similar tale.

One of Karen’s products was a heart-healthy supplement that offered a basket of benefits — including healthier blood pressure, better cholesterol levels, a stronger immune system, and healthy overall circulation — that might appeal to her customers.

If you remember Chapter 1, you already know that according to the principle of the Rule of One, you can usually get better results by focusing on one big benefit rather than a collection of small ones.

However, Karen points out, the multiple-benefits of the supplement were a key part of the story. “There’s more to heart health,” the sales letter pointed out, “than cholesterol alone.”

So, the first thing Karen did was fit the multiple benefits of her product into a single, simple message.

Here’s how it read:

What if I told you I could replace every bottle of pills on your shelf with...

The world's most perfect heart supplement

Including the one nutrient that can single-handedly

- ✓ Maintain healthy blood pressure
- ✓ Support healthy cholesterol levels
- ✓ Promote a strong immune system and
- ✓ Maintain healthy circulation



William Campbell Douglas II, MD

Dear Friend,

One pill for cholesterol...another for blood pressure...one more for triglycerides...and still another for free radical protection and overall healthy immune support. It might sound like a healthy shelf-full of heart supplements to some, but to me it sounds like a lot of pills (and money) to accomplish one goal—supporting a healthy heart.

I'm a doctor by trade and a skeptic by nature—so, I'm not one to call *anything* perfect. But, not only have I found one powerful nutrient that can replace all of the heart supplements on that shelf, it might just be the world's most *perfect* heart nutrient.

And while it'll be decades before you hear about it, read about it or see it on the evening news, there are thousands of people who've already replaced every bottle on their shelf with it...and they're reaping its benefits as I type this letter.

I'll tell you all about it in just a minute. But first, it's important to understand that...

There's more to the heart health story than cholesterol alone

Fact: not only does your body require some cholesterol to be healthy, but only 20% of your total cholesterol comes from the foods you eat. Your body makes the rest on its own—because it *needs* it.

It might also interest you to know that research done by renowned cardiologist, Dr. John

Karen ran an identical headline on the carrier envelope. The rest of the lead stressed this same core idea, that you could “replace every other pill on your shelf” with this one versatile supplement. It was a clear and simple big Promise Lead like those you’ve already seen in Chapter 5 of this book.

As a test, Karen also ran another version. “The test was a bit muddier,” says Karen, “more of an ‘idea lead’ if I had to call it something.” We might call it more of a Proclamation Lead, like those you saw in Chapter 8.

Instead of focusing on the supplement benefits, its headline and sub-headline copy read: “The medical mainstream may buy into the ‘cholesterol myth,’ but I know ... a lifetime of heart health does not begin and end with cholesterol alone. *Keep reading to discover the full story ... plus an easy way to help keep your ticker ticking starting today.*”

Like other Proclamation Leads, it was bold. And, it might make you curious.

But, we might also agree that it was “muddy.” The test version had to work too hard to close the open “cholesterol myth” question and then connect it to the multiple benefits of the supplement Karen and her team were trying to sell. What’s more, they knew that supplement readers are often very aware. They know roughly what they’re looking for and often respond best to more direct offers and promises.

That proved to be the case here, too. The straight Promise Lead out-pulled the test by a 50% margin. Naturally, you never know until you test. But, says Karen, once you know how aware your readers are, you can make a pretty good guess. “We learned a long time ago that big promises work to our file and so

most of our tests have been straight big promise versus big promise or problem-solution versus problem-solution.”

Not long after we first came up with the six lead archetypes for this book, financial copywriter Aaron Gentzler started work on sales copy for a service that researched fast-moving but little-known opportunities in technology stocks.

His lead mixed some of the types you’ve seen in this book — as some letters sometimes do — but if we could fit it into any one category, it might be closest to a cleverly-nuanced version of the Problem-Solution Lead samples you saw in Chapter 6.

Particularly, Aaron focused on something he already knew had strong emotional pull for the audience he was targeting, the fear of *missed opportunity*. Here’s how Aaron’s lead began ...

Your Great-Grandfather Saw The Railroad Come to Town, But Did He Profit From It?

Your Grandfather Watched The First Model T’s Roll Down the Street. Did He Get Rich?

Your Father’s Generation Witnessed the Rise of Computers. How Much Did He Make On Them?

The Next Massive Wealth Creation Starts NOW. Here’s how YOU Could Give Millions to Your Family’s Next 3 Generations.

The World Will Learn of What Could Be A Historic Breakthrough on Nov. 19 — and You Can Get in *Before the News Breaks* ...

His letter went on to compare the potential opportunity he was touting to the big wealth-creating events of the 20th century. We call this technique transubstantiation, where you add richness to an idea by elevating the context.

Big, once-in-a-lifetime opportunities are more than just a chance to do well with your money, his copy reasoned; they’re a chance to “build a generations-wide stream of wealth *for you and your family*.”

And then, of course, he went on to prove that the “next great advance” really could be large enough to see these kinds of destiny-altering gains. It was a big promise and needed some big proof. By adding the date — November 19 — he showed the promise was even more real. And, he also increased the urgency.

It worked.

In the first week, Aaron’s Problem-Solution pitch took in \$500,000 in new sales. And, those results kept on piling up over the weeks that followed. Since then, he says he’s been able to go back to the same formula successfully over and over again.

Copywriter Colm O’Dwyer also claims big success with our six-lead system. One of his most recent projects was a sales letter for a small cap stock research letter. “Small caps” are generally inexpensive, off-radar stocks without many shareholders.

Many of the big companies you know today started out as small cap stocks or even what the market calls “micro-caps.” Those who follow them like them because they have the potential to move quickly and, historically, they tend to beat bigger stocks.

That can make them an easy sell.

But Colm had a challenge. The letter’s publisher already had a very strong sales letter that had mailed

successfully for years. Colm knew he'd have to do something special to beat it.

Says Colm, “Looking at your six lead types, I knew that for the best chance at success, I should use a Story, Proclamation, or Secret Lead. But, finding a good, original story can be hard work and this product just didn't fit a Proclamation Lead, so I decided to use a Secret Lead.”

You'll remember, from Chapter 7, that Secret Leads work best when they promise to unlock a mystery that offers a big benefit to the reader. But, they also tend to withhold the most valuable piece of information until after the prospect has agreed to buy.

“After I had my direction,” says Colm, “I simply studied other secret-driven sales letters working right now, selling a similar product. Taking the best ideas from each ... and adding a few ideas of my own ... I was able to write a blockbuster package.”

Colm's letter went ahead and revealed the kinds of investments the product would follow. What it withheld was the details of the special process used to pick long strings of winning plays. Colm's headline featured a “**Secret \$200 Retirement Blueprint.**” And, his letter went on to promise readers a “step-by-step” approach that could turn even a small amount of money — say \$200 — into a much bigger cash pile, by rolling gains from one trade into another.

In the end, says Colm, “It was the most successful sales letter I've ever written. It not only thumped a long-standing control, but it's still generating a *lot* of royalties for me. It also happens to be the easiest sales letter I've ever written, too.”

So far, Colm's “blueprint” has brought in over 55,000 new customers.

Master Copywriter Mike Palmer also has countless sales letter breakthroughs under his belt. But, as we mentioned in Chapter 8, one of the biggest by far has to be the Proclamation Lead he recently wrote for another of our publishing colleagues. The product was a newsletter that had taken up a strong and pessimistic position on where the U.S. is headed, given its soaring national debt.

Here's the online space ad that lead to the video link:



**The Most Important
Day in America
in 50 Years...**

It will change the
way you travel...
shop... invest... and
even retire.

Watch the eye-opening presentation [here](#).

**WARNING: This presentation is controversial,
and may be offensive to some audiences.
Viewer discretion is advised...**

For the promotion itself, Mike took advantage of the video format and had his design team craft it in the same style of a “red band” movie trailer. This underscored the controversy of the message, made it feel even more urgent, and no doubt piqued the curiosity of viewers. This is what you would have seen

after clicking the link:



Because it was such a bold prediction, Mike spent the first few moments establishing credibility. He quickly gave the background of the analyst behind the prediction that would follow; another, bigger breakdown of the U.S. financial system and even some social and political structures that depend on it; and then dug into the deep and dramatic forecast.

Said the letter ...

“I reference our success and experience with Wall Street’s latest crisis because we believe there is an even bigger crisis lurking — something that will shake the very foundation of America.

“That is why I’ve spent a significant amount of time and money in the past few months preparing this letter.

“In short, I want to talk about a specific event that will take place in America’s very near future ... which could actually bring our country and our way of life to a grinding halt ... ”

Bold words. And, of course, the Proclamation Leads that work need to hit on the right emotions at the right time, as you saw in our earlier samples. When this particular promotion was released, worries about rising U.S. debt ran especially deep (as of this writing, they still do). And that helped this message touch a nerve with target readers.

In the first three months after this mailed, it brought in over 200,000 new subscribers. Sales topped \$10.5 million, making it one of the bestselling sales letters in the industry. Certainly it’s made a fortune for Mike and cemented what’s already been a stellar career.

Publisher Mike Ward and copywriter Jim Amrhein also wrote to us with a big Proclamation Lead success. They were also selling a financial research service, but for an analyst with an incredible back-story. Not only was their editor a top oil expert, but he used to work as a spy for the State Department. His list of industry contacts alone was almost unbelievable.

Here’s what they finally came up with ...

Just 50 People Control 90% of the World’s Energy Markets

...And They All Have Me on Speed Dial ...

I'm helping these Big Dogs set up three global energy "super shifts" right now — here's how you could play them for up to **2,505% gains in 13 months**

Dear Reader,

Forget Blue Chips ... microchips ... biotech ... gourmet coffee chains ... smartphones ... iPads ... iPods ... and i-Don't-know-whats ...

The biggest money in this world will ALWAYS be made by those who know how to play the energy markets.

The problem is that 99.9% of media pundits, market analysts, money managers, and investment advisors will never be able to help you win at this game.

That's because, unlike me, THEY don't have access to the small "Inner Circle" of power-players who control 90% of the world's energy.

So, they're always late getting into the real, fast-moving money plays that only *a handful of people in the world can see coming*.

I'm one of these people. And in this letter, I'll prove it to you ...

You can see that the bold statement, about an inner circle of "50 people" controlling most of the world's energy market, isn't really a promise outright, though it's certainly implied. And, the rest of the copy had to go on to prove that not only did this "Inner Circle" exist, but that they really do have a connection to the analyst behind the service.

Says Mike, "It was very challenging ... [because we wanted to feature his credentials] in a way that's credible, without bragging. We did about three rewrites. At one point, I just said, 'Why don't we just say that 20 or so people control 90% of the energy market, and our guy knows them all.' That was all Jim needed. He just ran with it and created the 'speed dial' thing and when we saw, everyone on the staff just went: 'Oh, yeah.' It was immediately cool and arresting." The target readers thought so, too.

This promotion, as of this writing, has racked up around \$6 million in sales in four months.

Copywriter Jennifer Stevens writes regularly for travel products. Story Leads, says Jen, are a staple in the travel industry, because they let you capture the romance of travel in a way the other lead types can't. She sent us this example. Notice how the story starts in the sub-headline copy and carries into the lead ...

What if You Had a Simple Blueprint to Take You from Where You Are Now ... to Your Perfect Place Overseas?

It took our editors, Dan and Suzan, a full decade to uncover the best secrets to the good life abroad ... But now you can do it easily. With their step-by-step blueprint, you save money ... avoid the pitfalls ... and find your perfect "sweet spot" overseas fast ...

So you can start living better (and for less), right away ...

Dear *International Living* Reader,

They started out in Ecuador ... tried on three places in Mexico for size ... moved to Panama ... did a stint in Nicaragua ... went back to Mexico ... and now they're spending part of the year in Ecuador

again ...

They've rented ... renovated ... traveled with pets ... learned a new language ... had teeth fixed ... been operated on ... bought homes ... sold homes ... rented homes out ...

For the last decade, our editors Dan Prescher and Suzan Haskins have capitalized on many of the best opportunities on the planet ...

They've saved tens of thousands of dollars in day-to-day expenses ... but live much better than they ever did back in Omaha, Nebraska. (And no more snow to shovel, either.)

Today they have a gorgeous colonial home in Merida, Mexico — a city full of sunlight and music. And when it gets too hot there, they decamp to their penthouse apartment in Ecuador's highlands, in a place where the air is clear and crisp all year round.

If they were still Stateside, they'd be living in a middle-class neighborhood, working 50-plus hours a week, driving in the ice, saving up for the day when they could — hopefully — retire.

Instead, for the past ten years, they've been enjoying life. Traveling lots. Living well. Free from the money pressures and stress of life in the States, there's time to relax, enjoy themselves, appreciate the comforts ...

The letter goes on to tell you how they did it, mistakes they made, and what they wish they'd known up front. The copy even includes a tempting photo of Dan and Suzan's gorgeous courtyard pool at their affordable home in Mexico. Notice how the letter doesn't just make a promise, but demonstrates it with the narrative.

That's the strength of the Story Lead.

Says Jen, they almost didn't go this way. "Here we had this 'retire overseas kit' that should sell but just never did. So, we reinvented it. We added videos and sliced up content to put into little reports. Then, we tried selling it as '90 days to your new life overseas.' That didn't work either. So, then I redid the lead again to position the kit as Dan and Suzan's blueprint for their new overseas life — and that worked great." In just five days, this sales letter brought in \$75,636 in new sales and it continues to work.

Why This Is Really All You Need

One of the challenges we faced in writing this book was finding perfect examples for our six lead types. Why was it difficult? Because much current advertising is a mix of one, two, or more of these true "archetypes" rather than any one in particular. And, our desire was to use examples that were as "pure" to one type as possible, to make the message that much easier to get across.

In fact, maybe you noticed, just to make our message clear, we wrote each of these chapters about a lead type so they would start with the kind of lead in question. So, even there, we took pains to show you — rather than just tell you — how to best open with each kind of lead.

In the end, what we can tell you is this: Between us, we have looked at hundreds of successful packages over the years. Easily over 80% of the winners do indeed lead predominantly with one of these six pure lead types, if not a blend of two or more similar types.

Does this mixing dilute the effectiveness of the lead or counter what we said early in this book about the Rule of One? It can. But in the best leads, the effectiveness is maintained as long as the copywriter uses the different tools to stick to one core message.

Bottom line: When in doubt, stick to the six pure types you've learned here. Enjoy the success understanding each will bring. Then, when you've mastered each lead type and you've isolated a *single* sales message to focus on, you can slowly branch out to hybrid lead types.

But, do just what you've seen here, and you'll already find yourself leagues ahead of other persuasive writers. You'll find your advertising leads are much stronger, more successful, and more profitable for both you and your clients.

What's more, here's a bonus: Apply these same lead-writing rules throughout the rest of your persuasive copy and you'll see huge benefits there, too. Use the Rule of One, for instance, to focus your sales messages. Use the idea of message directness to make sure you're speaking the right way to the right kind of customer, right through to your offer reply page.

And so on.

You'll find you write stronger offers, make more irresistible promises, identify more relevant solutions for your buyers, tease better opportunities, tell stronger and more persuasive stories, and more.

Of course, there's only one way for you to be sure that we're right about this final claim. And, that's to try what we're suggesting for yourself. Once you do, we're sure you'll agree.