

The Power of One – One Big Idea

By Michael Masterson

One of the biggest lessons I have ever learned about writing 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 issues I'd written that year and noting which ones readers rated the highest. Without exception, those achieving the highest scores presented a single idea.

It struck me that readers didn't want to hear everything I had to say about a topic every time I wrote. They were looking for a single, useful suggestion or idea that could make them more successful.

That was one of those "aha!" experiences for me.

As a reader, I had always most enjoyed stories and essays that tackled one subject effectively and deeply. As a writer, I sensed my readers felt 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 checked to see if this same phenomenon applied to advertising copy. I pulled out my box of "best promotions of all time." While not all of them were on a single topic, most of the very best hit just one idea strongly.

It seemed I was on to something. I presented this idea as one "powerful secret to publishing success" when Agora had our first company-wide meeting for publishers in France.

Bill Bonner reminded me he'd learned about the Power of One from the great advertising guru David Ogilvy. Ogilvy's concept was that every great promotion has, at its core, a single, powerful idea that he called "the Big Idea."

At about that same time, John Forde 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 listed his choice for the "Top 100 Headlines." John found that of those 100 top headlines, 90 were driven by single, Big Ideas.

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?"

At ETR, we made this concept a "rule" for writing. The mandate was clear. Write about one thing at a time. One good idea, clearly and convincingly presented, was better than a dozen so-so ideas strung together.

When we obeyed that rule, our essays were stronger. When we ignored it, they were not as powerful as they could have been.

Here's an example of the Rule of One as applied to an *advertorial* taken from ETR:

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 Power of One operates here.

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

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

That statement is 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 Power 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 11 words: "My very first e-book has generated \$20,727 in sales (so far)."
- **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 "click here now."

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

Veteran advertising consultant James Loftus, who's worked with Anheuser-Busch, Holiday Inn, McDonald's, and many other clients, agrees:

"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."

When challenged with an advertising assignment, most writers conjure lists of features and benefits, then mention as many as possible. Their thinking goes, "I wonder which of these benefits will really push the buttons I want? I'll throw them all in. That way if one doesn't work, another one will."

This is B-level copywriting. It's *not* the way to create breakthrough advertising.

The Power of One is commonplace now at Agora ... it's taught by AWAI ... and you'll see that most top copywriters follow it.

You can use the Power of One to create your own blockbuster copy. Ask yourself: "What is the Big Idea here?" "Is this idea strong enough to capture the hearts of my customers?" Or "Are my ideas all over the place?"

The challenge is to find that one good idea the reader can grasp immediately. And stick to it. So the idea has to be strong, easy to understand ... *and* easy to believe.

Put the Power of One to work for you in all your communications. You'll be amazed at how much stronger – and successful – your copy will be.

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36 Responses to "The Power of One — One Big Idea"

Michael this post has given me the poke in the ribs that I needed. I have not been writing copy for long. And all I hear is extract the most amount of benefits out of your product or service.

Not realising that The Power of One is more targeted to gain the readers attention. Has given me the inspiration to not only go back over my product/service but to understand the Power of One in all my advertising.

Now it's back to the drawing board in Accelerated Copy Writing Course.

Thanks

Youpele(aka Pele)

Pele – over a year ago

I have never done any sales or copywriting, but joined AIWA today so I can learn from experts. I have done other writing that was grammatically correct, good vocabulary, correctly spelled, proofread and edited, but did not excite or inspire. After reading "The Power of One" I want to say thanks for a great first lesson in simplicity and genius!

Adtaurusred

Adtaurusred – over a year ago

I am beginning to poke my toe into the pool and like what I see. Newbie, I am. Write like I talk...alot on paper...want to free ourselves from the day to day...AWAI you are my ticket out, at last! DEEP BREATH...COS here I come!

Thank you for having so much 'stuff' available...follow your rules, don't cheat and become another success story...thank you!

Gypsy Rover – over a year ago

I've been writing all my life without pay...(yuk)...but after reading--skimming--AWAI's book, I know I can do this. Scared I am; so what? And who isn't scared of failure? However, I'm going back through all the exercises and I'm certain I'll become

a success. AWAI's material makes it seem as though one could sell "ice water to an Eskimo." Guess what...I've done that with all three of my grown sons and husband. I'm a mom. Mom's can do practically anything so I'm convinced I WILL become a successfull copywriter. Thanks AWAI

alena diaz – over a year ago

This information is most valuable. As a brand new member of the Prof. Writers Alliance, and this being my first time logging in I can see the valuable decision I made to join this organization. I have already learned so much just by reading a couple of the articles that said read this first before you write. I believe that becoming a member of AWAI right before Christmas of 2012 was the best present I could have given myself to start of my 2013!

Hallway – over a year ago

Valuable!! Thank you for all of the support and information to help me on this new adventure. This is territory I'm not too familiar with, but for some reason I feel like I will learn a lot and have fun doing it! I love challenges, so get ready to write that check (\$10,000)...

Ms Biggs – over a year ago

I'm wondering what the final advice of AWAI is on this question - whether we should include one incredible, most desirable benefit - or (as the Bootcamp spec assignments advise) include as many benefits as possible? Or should it be somewhere in between - identifying the 'umbrella' or 'generic' benefit, which incorporates all the rest? I understand the power of the big idea - definitely essential - but one core benefit...?

Nick – over a year ago

Hi, Great article. Looking at the sales letter, is there anyway to see the website the CLICK HERE button lead to? Once they click the sales letter, how much info should be on the webpage? I think it would just be corresponding the message but I would love to see it for reference?

Thanks!

Nick

Guest (Nick Mo) – over a year ago

I am newly semi-retired and have always had an interest in pursuing writing through blogs or newsletters. This program looks like it will assist me with the knowledge and tools to achieve this.

I am excited to take on a new challenge and have set myself a goal of three months to receive my first paid assignment.

Sharon sharing – over a year ago

How come it says in "accelerated Copywriting" to follow the thorough description of the one big benefit with a list of every other benefit of the product or service? I am confused. Please explain.

Terry Chestnutt – over a year ago

Great info here...newbie also who loves words and a pen in hand but no knowledge yet of how to master them...This place has great promise that sure will be delivered! Can't wait for the financial freedom that has been toooooo long in coming. Thank You!

Laura Mc – over a year ago

I have been looking for the impetus to get my writing career going, and the confidence to make use of my skills. The impetus has been provided by a terrible year in my current career, and the confidence was just provided by reading this article. One Big Idea, indeed!

Thanks!

CalKelly – over a year ago

ALL THEIR COMMENTS GAVE ME SOME INSIGHT ON WHAT I HAVE TO DO BUT WHO REALLY KNOW WHAT TO SAY OR WRITE UNTIL IT'S DONE THEN YOU WILL FIND OUT IF YOU HAVE OR GETTING THAT MIDAS TOUCH

pandora – over a year ago

Wonderful!

Very good tips for writing. Normally, we try to coin many ideas together, hoping that some may hit the targeted customer/audience

Jitendra – over a year ago

I like the idea of ONE focal point. The trouble is - some things that developers want promoted just cannot stand up when you only use one of their values! I apologise if that insults many sellers, but it is true. I have tried to write these ads for them, but always end having to give several reasons to buy.

Any suggestions, please?

Cher1yl – over a year ago

Haven't been an AWAI member very long but I'm already learning important techniques and am excited about applying them to many different types of writing. I have a journalism background but this is a whole new world. Thanks for being there, AWAI!

Maddie1223 – over a year ago

Tireponyman(tm) is new here and excited to learn how to write. AWAI OFFERS SO VERY MUCH. THANK YOU The power of one is a good concept and approach to better marketing.

Tireponyman – over a year ago

One idea for one purpose that sells! Thank you.

JT-hewro – over a year ago

I marvel at the conventional thinking that more is better.No matter what happens, in the end, the one big idea prevails. Faced with so many angles, the "scanner eyes" choose none because there seems to be too many "hooks" in the water (copy) in the form of benefits and the emotion is stone cold dry, stale and ignored. The "one big idea" time has come.

Myles – over a year ago

My reaction was typical for me; I wonder if I could still get this e-book for \$19? All kidding aside, I've been brainstorming topics for the Money Making Web Sites program coming up and e-books fit nicely with that concept.

JimBob from Canada – over a year ago

I have wondered how to make writing pay for a very long time. I'd seen the ads before and dismissed them as hyped rhetoric that couldn't help me. Finally I decided to take advantage of the bargain offer, as I have had some time to invest in personal re-training. What I have seen in my first week gives me confidence that I can convert a thing I have always done well, but never made a living from, into the way I fund my retirement in the way I would like to become accustomed.

Jon Cocks – over a year ago

I am slowly learning to be more observant as I read and write. This post made me go back and reread something I'd written to identify every specific point made to see if it supported the one central idea.

writeyoureality – over a year ago

Really fantastic. Working on one idea at a time brings all your good thoughts and ideas perfectly out of you. If you mingle many ideas, at a time, in your writing, it becomes disastrous. You cannot justify all the ideas at one point. If you work only on one thought or idea, it may prove to be wondrous. so the power of one-one big idea may make a great effect on the reader as you can pour more and more thoughts concentrating on this one big idea.

Mahesh Seelvi – over a year ago

I would think the one big feature will dominate...say, at least half the copy...and then the other features together share the other half.

jimsmith – over a year ago

Love the simplicity of this notion of ONE idea evoking one response--

Eileen – over a year ago

the power of one is great, because it solidifies what we know in terms of things like multitasking, or studying and listening to the radio. Not everyone are able to focus on two different things at the same time. As a writer, one that is great at persuasion, how simple it is to pick a few points and drive home my point for the reader. As a reader, I prefer a few simple good reasons backed by evidence. Then just get to the bottom line.

Thanks!

Jireh – over a year ago

New to AWAI and loving everything I'm reading. VERY excited! I was a voracious writer in my early years. The power of ONE BIG IDEA was evident even in short stories which is where the majority of my effort landed . The old adage "short and sweet" makes perfect sense in copy. Looking forward to the infinite possibilities in writing for a living. Best wishes to everyone on this site.

mewriter – over a year ago

The Power of the Big Idea is like a gravitational force that draws its strength upon the axis of its solid relevance and substance and what it can offer in every which way possible the targeted audience in terms of absolute value, I guess.

Merletheman – over a year ago

This is awesome and has given me some ideas already!

Mandy TM – over a year ago

Very informational article. The big idea or the power of one is the most important thing in writing. When you stuck to one idea it gives the absolute value to the reader. The idea of one tantalizes, compels to think, makes the reader feel satisfied. The concept of one binds the reader and the reader can fully understand what the writer wants to say.

Guest (Mahesh Seelvi) – over a year ago

Well I just have to tell you that I DO NOT HAVE A DIME TO MY WALLET SO CANT BUY ANYTHING RIGHT NOW. IF u are truly a good kind company, then u will just send me any info for free to my gmail address.

I wont be purchasing any info or material of yours until i get my small settlement money at the end of the year.

Have a blessed day.

Guest (Amy) – over a year ago

Help. I have been all over the main site. I paid and joined the Barefoot group and see a lot of material I can also purchase. Then there are the other groups all with materials I can purchase. More money outlay. Is this really a dump site for people who want to sale stuff or one, as I was led to believe, that will walk me through and into copy writing?

DrBob – over a year ago

If you notice there is one particular smile in my name that I am grateful to share with those who can recognize the pun! And with this one and only idea of seeking this particular advantage is and will be my one and only quest to gain access to this personal invitation to be the winner of this years Ten Thousand K. If you would be so kind as to add the last three characters to these four {u812} from the display name. I would have succeeded in my delivery. I except the invitation Gracefully.

Wow-i81 – over a year ago

Hello!

Thank you for this reminder to K.I.S.S.

I have been labeled "verbose" by a few people, and need to remember that my language level should be around "Dean Koontz".

Millie-Ilene – over a year ago

I hope to be great in the ebook writing to expand my writing skills to raised the lever of confidence with a passion. Or write articles. Something I would love to do with a heartfelt heart. Strongly I am determine.

Confidence – over a year ago

YES! I HAVE AN IDEA (OR TWO) FOR YOU TO PONDER AIMED AT THE 10K CHALLENGE. WATCH OUT!

Urell O – over a year ago

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