

When You Absolutely, Positively, Need to Capture Your Prospect's Attention

By Will Newman

Finish this tagline:

"When it absolutely, positively has to ..."

"... be there overnight." This pitch was so effective that most people still think of it as FedEx's tagline.

Why was it so effective? Certainly it has a catchy swing to it. And it was plastered all over. But that's not what made it such a winner.

"When it absolutely, positively ..." was a winner because it expresses a strong, deep, relevant promise. There's no doubt what the promise is. It's stated so clearly you really can't express it in simpler terms.

AWAI programs teach "The 4 P's." **P**romise – **P**icture – **P**roof – **P**ush. The promise comes first. It comes first in the list because it's first in your letter. It's first in the letter because it is the single most important element of any promotion of any type.

100-plus years of proof

Every successful ad since the early 1900's stands on a strong promise. Before then, most ads took the form of news stories. Products were announced and explained.

Then in 1904, John E. Kennedy discussed his new theory of advertising. Kennedy called his approach "reason-why" ads.

"To strike the responsive chord with the reader ... is to multiply the selling power of every reason-why given."

(John E. Kennedy)

Within four months of testing these promise-driven ads, they were so successful his client increased his budget from \$15,000 per year to \$30,000 *per month*.

John Forde and Michael Masterson put the importance of a strong promise in more modern terms in their new book, *Great Leads: The Six Easiest Ways to Start Any Sales Message*:

"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."

The reason your promise is so crucial is simple. All advertising is based on solving problems. When you write a promo — regardless of the niche — you're telling your prospect you have a solution for a problem. The promise bridges the gap between the problem and the solution.

Let's say the problem is out-of-control blood sugar. The solution is a new nutritional supplement. Your promise — the bridge — could be: The all-natural components reduce blood sugar by 37%, allowing you to eat normally without worry.

The problem could be the plight of homeless teenagers. The solution is a shelter for homeless youth. Your promise — the bridge — could be: Your \$100 donation will feed, clothe, and house a homeless teen for one month. This allows her to go to school, keeping her off the streets, and reducing the possibility of her using drugs by 83%.

Of course, in giving your promise, you'd spend more time describing it. And, you'd use your picture and proof sections to flesh it out.

Here are two headlines with strong, explicit promises:

Help Companies Tell Their Stories ... Collect \$125-\$300 *an Hour*.

(AWAI Website)

**Lure beautiful, sweet-singing birds to your yard ...
ALL YEAR LONG**

(Rodale book promo)

To create successful promises, follow these 5 simple rules ...

You can't expect just any promise to make a promo successful. Successful promises follow specific rules. Follow these rules, and your promise — and your promotion — will be much stronger. And that much closer to success.

Rule for Success #1: Promise something your prospect wants

This seems obvious. But all too often, copywriters look at a product and decide what to promise without thinking carefully about the prospect.

To work, your promise must touch your prospect's deepest hopes, dreams, fears, wants, and desires. You must also take into account his views of the world and himself. (Taken together, his core complex.)

Rule for Success #2: To find your biggest promise, find your product's USP

Start your search for a strong promise with your product's USP (Unique Selling Proposition). The USP is what makes your product different from all other similar ones. How does the USP impact your prospect's core complex? How does it make your prospect's life better?

This is your strongest promise. By starting with the USP and the core complex together, you're able to promise something your prospect hasn't seen before.

Rule for Success #3: The promise must be clear, strong, focused

Don't be subtle when formulating your promise. State it simply. Look at the promise in the AWAI headline: "Collect \$125-\$300 an Hour." There's no doubt what you're being promised. Clear. Strong. Focused.

Rule for Success #4: Go beyond obvious things in making promises

When fleshing out your promise, don't always think "fear and greed." Your prospect is a complex person. So look into subtler things to promise like friendship, respect, satisfaction, and the like.

Rule for Success #5: Be sure the promise relates directly to your product

Again, an "obvious" aspect of a strong promise ... that's often skipped over. If your product lowers blood sugar, you can promise freedom from fear of high blood sugar's devastating effects. But it doesn't make sense to promise that women will fall all over your prospect because he's sexy-looking.

This *could* happen. But it just doesn't relate directly enough to your product to be able to promise it. Go too far from your product's obvious benefits and capabilities and you lose credibility. The prospect will feel — rightfully — that you're "playing" him. And you lose the sale.

Final words ...

Not all promos state the promise right in the headline. (Although many do.) But regardless of the type of headline you use, you *must* relay your promise early in your copy. I like to do it within the first two paragraphs unless I'm using a story lead. Even then, though, I make sure it follows the story quickly.

Don't waste words when telling it, either. When you first decide on the promise, write it down. If you can't say it within 15 words, rethink it. Revise it. Rewrite it. When it's concise, tape it over your computer.

This concise promise is what you want to tell your prospect. Do it right and your promotion will be on its way to success. I promise.

Something exciting: I just got really good news about something I had a personal hand in. One of my most enjoyable jobs recently was editing Michael Masterson and John Forde's book, *Great Leads: The Six Easiest Ways to Start Any Sales Message*. I thought I knew a lot about leads until I got to work on this small masterpiece. When I did, I learned more about writing powerful leads than from any other single resource. What I've learned, I've used in my own promos, in my teaching, and in everything I write for AWAI.

What's the good news? I just learned that this book — that I helped come to life — is now available on Amazon! If you don't have your own copy yet, check it out by [clicking here](#).

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1 Response to "When You Absolutely, Need to Capture Your Prospect's Attention"

Great information Will! Like you, I've read and studied Michael Masterson and John Fordes' new book, "Great Leads" and I recommend it for all copywriters. Don't just read it once but read and study it over and over again!

Guest (Richard Smith) – over a year ago

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