

The "Hidden" Component for Killer Sales Letters

By Will Newman

Are your sales letters doomed to mediocrity?

Mark Ford (aka Michael Masterson) has identified three components that drive 80% of the success of any sales letter. If these components are weak, your promotion will never rise to A-level copywriting — which is where you want to be.

These three crucial components are your headline, lead, and Big Idea.

No problem with the first two. You're on your way to learning about powerful headlines and leads. But what about the Big Idea? What's that? And how do you find one?

That's what I'm going to talk about today and next week. I'm going to draw on some of AWAI's excellent resources, but — I'm also going to let you in on secrets Jen Stevens and John Forde revealed at this year's Bootcamp.

You know it when you see it ...

Mark is not the first great copywriter to recognize the importance of the Big Idea. Writing almost 40 years ago, legendary master David Ogilvy said: "It takes a Big Idea to attract the attention of consumers and get them to buy your product."

So what is a Big Idea? Unfortunately, it's one of those concepts that's easier to see in action than to define.

But for starters, the Big Idea is an idea that has these four characteristics ...

1. Your readers haven't seen it before ...
2. Immediately captures their attention ...
3. Relates to their core complex (emotions, beliefs, view of the world) ...
4. Relates in a direct way to what you're trying to get them to buy or respond to (without being your product itself) ...

Let's take a look at how Master Copywriter Mike Palmer used a Big Idea in a promo for the investment advisory *True Wealth*.

Title: PRIVATE PROPOSAL

Subject: Outlawed for 41 years, now legal again this investment launched the largest family fortune the world has ever seen And could return 665% in the next 12 months

Prepared by: George Rayburn, Executive Director

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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.

He was sent to nearby Hanover for a banking apprenticeship. There, he entered the homes of Germany's wealthy and powerful men: Princes, Grand Dukes, and Archbishops.

And, listening carefully, he learned about the secret money of the very rich — the currency of the world's controlling elite:

What is the Big Idea behind this promotion? That there was a "secret currency" — once outlawed — that the very wealthy have used for generations to build their wealth. And it's now legal once again.

Let's look at how this lead stacks up against the four characteristics of a Big Idea:

1.

New: Mike based this promo on Mayer Rothschild's real biography. But the Big Idea was one that had never been used in the financial niche before.

2. **Powerfully compelling:** The Big Idea is immediately compelling. If you're involved in investing in some way, wouldn't you like to know how the very, very rich got that way? How someone like Mayer Rothschild rose from poverty to extravagant wealth?
3. **Relates to the core complex:** The reader of this promo believes that the super rich are privy to specialized knowledge that got them their wealth. He also believes that if only he knew those secrets, he could cash in.
4. **Relates to the product:** Without ever mentioning *True Wealth* in the first eight or so pages of his promotion, Mike made a strong case that the way to find out these secrets was through *True Wealth*.

Bingo! Mike's promotion is dead on as a Big Idea promo.

Here's another example taken from the Alternative Health niche, Kent Komae's *Mountain Home Nutritionals* promo. (And familiar to all COS Leads members.)

**"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!"**

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 ...

When it came out, most joint supplements featured chondroitin and glucosamine. And most of the promos touted those components as the "latest thing" even though they were, by then, old hat.

So Kent adopted a new approach with the Big Idea that chondroitin and glucosamine were not enough, that "in the future ..."
(Characteristic #1)

If you were suffering from stiff, sore joints and felt the standard remedies weren't working, this promo grabbed your attention (Characteristic #2). And as a sufferer, you badly wanted relief and wanted to hear about something new (Characteristic #3).

And did this promo relate directly to the product, without using it as the Big Idea (Characteristic #4)? Right from the beginning!

So, there you have two examples of expert use of the Big Idea to craft successful promotions.

But as I said, no definition of the Big Idea can do it justice. The best way to understand it is to see it used skillfully over and over. Check out **AWAI's Hall of Fame: Great Selling Ideas from Super-Successful Direct Mail Letters and Direct Response Ads** and look carefully at those letters and ads. All of them are based on Big Ideas. Sometimes the idea isn't as obvious as the ones I've used here, but if you scratch deep, you'll find them.

Where do you find Big Ideas for your own copywriting? Next week I'll let Jen and John tell you.

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