

# Dominant Emotion Copy Wins Every Time

*By Clayton Makepeace*

Ask a thousand people, "What's the most powerful thing man ever created?" – and I'll wager most will say, "The atomic bomb" or "Television" or "The Internet" or some other kind of technology.

Not surprising. Seems like more folks worship at high tech's silicon altar today than profess any one of the world's other great faiths.

To hear the tech evangelists tell it, their deity can do just about anything any other divinity can.

Biotech, nanotech and other cutting-edge medical technologies have the power to create, sustain and save life. Laser surgery makes the blind see. State-of-the-art limbs have the lame walking.

Cutting-edge brain drugs cast out demons; Restoring sanity, banishing depression and instilling joy. And of course, high-tech agriculture feeds multitudes every day around the globe.

Eternal life? That one's taking a little longer – *but they're working on it!*

Of course, being a deity isn't all hearts and flowers. Sometimes Great Unseen Hands itch to give us naughty humans a good old-fashioned spanking. And technology is no slouch there, either: It's ready, willing and able to answer the call with carnage that makes the Great Flood pale by comparison.

High-tech biological weapons, nerve agents, nukes, bunker-busters and smart bombs – delivered in virtually invisible stealth bombers or in missiles traveling at many times the speed of sound – can easily obliterate more humans than drew a breath when old Noah and his boys were cobbling their ark together.

But I say technology worship is heresy.

I say, there's something far more awe-inspiring – and its power is within your grasp:

## In the Beginning was The Word ...

Language – ordinary WORDS – are mankind's greatest and most powerful invention. By a long, *LONG* shot.

Whether they're expressed as a blob of black ink on white paper or a vibration in the air, words are the great equalizer. They have brought down dynasties, made the weak strong, and transformed peasants into kings since the dawn of time.

And in a very real way, words are the fathers – *the Creators* – of every modern wonder you can name; indispensable tools in conceiving, inventing, developing and distributing every great technological achievement across the globe.

What's more, if there were no words, high-tech communications contraptions like the Internet, television, radio, telephones and fax machines would be next to worthless: No more memorable and with no more practical value than a magician's trick top hat.

If history teaches us anything, it's that every one of our greatest achievements is the product of ordinary written or spoken words, strung together in extraordinary ways ...

- Buddha, Confucius, Jesus, Mohammed, Moses and *every other* religious leader in history used ordinary words to influence human behavior – and even to inspire millions of ordinarily self-obsessed humans to perform utterly illogical, self-sacrificing acts.
- Our rights, liberties, responsibilities and the laws we must follow are memorialized in constitutions and other scraps of paper containing nothing more than ordinary words.
- The social and business contracts, obligations and promises that bind us together are made with nothing more than words.
- And throughout history, countless conquerors, kings, heroes and despots moved the masses to inexplicably illogical action, super-human feats and in some cases, unthinkable brutality using nothing more than ordinary words.

Everything you have or will ever have came to you through the use of words: Love, sex, money, respect – the lot.

Even the deaf use sign language to get what they need. Words.

Prayer? More words.

**So what exactly ARE these forces of nature anyway?  
... And what gives them such extraordinary power?**

Words are little more than tangible (heard, seen) substitutes for other things.

I can show you an elephant by arranging to have one crash through your picture window, lumber into your living room, rearrange your furniture and poop on your carpet.

Or, I can merely say the word "elephant" – and your subconscious will serve up a vivid mental image for you. (Needless to say, using the word instead of the deed is far more efficient and not nearly as messy.)

I can point to the sky – in which case you'll have to look up and figure out whether I mean, "sky," or "cloud" or "sun," or "heaven" – or I can just say "blue."

I can run into your living room and begin jumping around wildly – and leave it up to you to divine whether I mean "dance" or "nut case" – or I can just yell, "FIRE!"

Without words, our lives would be one, endless game of Charades.

But besides their ability to communicate (and keep us from acting like idiots in the process), words alone don't really have much power.

It's when you implant a word into the human brain that it sets off the chain reaction that changes the world. As I've pointed out before in these pages ...

1.  
When a word enters your conscious mind – whether visually or aurally – your brain has to do something with it. That "something" is called a thought.
2. Thoughts trigger emotions – both positive ones like love, joy, desire and compassion, and negative ones like hatred, anger and fear.
3.  
Emotions create two kinds of impulses:
  - The impulse to act on the emotion: Love can make the act of hugging a child irresistible. Fear makes running from a fire a no-brainer.
  - The impulse to re-experience (or avoid) reliving the emotion: Experiencing a positive emotion makes us want to repeat the experience. And vice-versa: Suffering through a negative emotion makes us want to avoid it in the future. Those impulses often govern our actions.
4. And of course, when impulses are acted upon, they become part of our personal histories ... affect everyone around us ... and in some cases, change the world.

*BOTTOM LINE:* When a word triggers a thought ... which triggers an emotion ... which triggers an impulse ... which triggers an action in thousands or millions at the same time, it's called "Great Sales Copy."

# Why Dominant Emotion Copy Wins

In a past issue, we took a look at how John E. Kennedy and Albert Lasker revolutionized copywriting by introducing the concept of "Reason-Why" Advertising.

Their breakthrough was all about reasoning with a prospect just as a good live salesman would – presenting all the logical reasons why a product should be purchased.

Just do that and your ads will do well.

But will reason-why advertising by itself make you filthy, stinking rich?

Not necessarily.

Now, I don't want to insult you here ... but the simple fact is, unless your prospect is having a heart attack and you're promoting the only emergency room in town, there are probably a LOT of things he should be doing instead of blowing a wad of cash on your product.

... Like socking his money away for a rainy day – just to make sure he'll always have all the food, clothing and shelter he'll need for the rest of his life, for example.

That would be the mature, adult, intelligent, *rational* thing to do – wouldn't it?

That way – instead of saving less than a nickel out of every dollar as we Americans do now – your prospect could be saving 50% ... 60% ... even 70% of each paycheck, and the compounding interest would be making him a millionaire, many times over.

*But what a dreary life he would have, and what a boring world it would be!*

If consumers only bought the things that are logical to buy ...

- Homebuyers would never purchase more house than they absolutely needed for survival. And they would be bleak, spartan places with only the bare necessities – and without high-tech kitchen gadgets, big-screen TVs or even carpeting.
- There would be no Starbucks, no bars or liquor stores, and certainly no cigarette companies – because after all, these things are not only unnecessary for survival – they're also costly, and unhealthy and therefore, not rational to consume.
- No truly practical, intelligent person would ever subject himself to the massive depreciation that strikes when a new car is driven its first few feet off of the dealers lot. Everyone would want 10-year-old sub-compacts that get 30 or 40 miles to the gallon. Or better yet: They'd take the bus.
- Spending money on entertainment would be considered a horrible waste. The film, video and video game industries

would dry up and blow away. We could easily survive with one radio per family, and one radio station per city ... they'd only broadcast indispensable information ... and they'd only turn on their transmitters when absolutely necessary. TV? Hah! Who needs to see the guy who's giving you the news?

- Women would never again blow a single dollar on makeup, designer fashions, sexy shoes, hair color, perfume, "push-up" bras or "pull-in" foundation garments, or anything else to make them more attractive to men. I mean – what's the point? *We're guys, they're gals* – if a million years of evolution teaches anything, it's that we're going to chase them no matter *what!*

- 

Since nobody really needs status to survive, status symbols would be non-existent. There would be no Cadillacs, BMWs, Mercedes or Rolls Royces ...

No Sub-Zero refrigerators, Bosch dishwashers, Miele vacuum cleaners or KitchenAid Superba trash compactors ...

No Rolex, Breitling or Movado watches ...

And certainly, no pleasure boats, RVs or private airplanes!

- And since advice is merely somebody's opinion – and as such, could easily be *wrong* – who in their right mind would ever *pay* for a book or newsletter on health or investment?

As Pat Steel of the Young & Rubicam ad agency once put it ...

***"People don't really need these things. People don't really need art, music, literature, newspapers, historians, wheels, calendars, philosophy ...***

***"All that people really need is a cave, a piece of meat, and possibly, a fire."***

Nevertheless, the companies that make and sell all these things are thriving!

Why?

Because we human beings are NOT merely rational creatures, seeking only to get what we need for physical survival.

We are also highly *emotional* beings. And our emotional needs are every bit as valid to us – and every bit as crucial to fulfill – as our physical ones.

In fact ...

***The minute we're sure we have plenty of air, water, food and a roof over our heads, our emotional needs become far more compelling to us than anything else.***

***And, unlike our cravings for food and shelter, which cease once these needs are met, our emotional needs are never fully satisfied!***

That's why we work hard all of our lives. It's why most families now have not one, but two paychecks.

We do it because we have a driving need to respect and value ourselves ... to win the love, admiration and respect of others ... to experience pleasure, avoid pain and assuage our fears.

We even go into debt and leverage our future financial security to buy the stuff that does these things for us – and more.

What percentage of our income do we spend on true necessities – the things we need for physical survival? How much do we spend on our " ... cave, a piece of meat and a fire?"

I'd be shocked if it was more than 20% or 30% of what we spend each year. And if I'm right, that means we spend the rest – a whopping 70% to 80% of our income or even more – to satisfy emotional needs!

## **Dominant emotion copy multiplies your response and income by putting this crucial fact of life to *work* for you!**

Now think: If 80%, 90% or more of your sales are made to people looking to satisfy an emotional need in their lives ...

... Isn't it possible that you could multiply the number of your sales and profits *by an order of magnitude* by appealing directly to those emotions – the part of your prospect's psyche that is actually *making* the purchase decision?

That's where dominant emotion copy techniques really shine.

Put simply, they are the "extra ingredient" – the added layer of thought that ramps up the intensity and selling power of every technique you're currently using.

They ensure that every benefit you offer ... every "reason why" you present ... and every USP you write connects directly with your prospects' strongest emotions.

In a nutshell, dominant emotion is the icing on the cake. The "oomph" that makes your benefits, your "reason-why" arguments and your USP sing!

## Having said what Dominant Emotion Sales Copy *IS*, here's what it *IS NOT*:

**First: Dominant emotion copywriting is evolutionary – NOT revolutionary.** It is the natural extension of proven, time-honored marketing strategy and tactics.

It does not free you from the need to trumpet your product's benefits, develop a powerful USP or provide compelling reasons why your prospect should buy from you.

In fact, when you enthusiastically and skillfully present your product's benefits, Unique Selling Proposition, and "Reasons Why" your prospect should buy, you often trigger your prospect's most dominant emotions by accident!

But when you decide that identifying and directly addressing your prospect's emotional needs is a priority in your ad copy, you *amplify* the selling power of USP-driven, benefit-oriented, "reason-why" advertisements by an order of magnitude.

**SECOND: Dominant Emotion Marketing is NOT "hype."** Dominant emotion copy is not merely ramping up the emotional tone of your promotions to hysterical levels or putting slammers ("!") all over the place. And it is certainly not about making false, misleading or unbelievable advertising claims.

Falling into these traps is the undoing of many otherwise savvy marketers. If any component of your sales message is less than believable, more prospects will be turned off than will buy. And if your product doesn't live up to your sales message, those who do become customers will be one-time customers only.

In fact, when done well, Dominant Emotion copy is *more* credible and therefore more effective *because* it attaches the appropriate emotions to the real and credible benefits your product offers.

If a stranger calls me, saying, "*Pardon me, old chap, but I was just driving by, and I couldn't help but notice that your roof appears to be oxidizing rather rapidly ...*"

I'd probably assume it was a telemarketing call from a roofing company, holler a hearty "F\*\*\* YOU!" and slam the phone down. (I know I would; *I've seen me do it!*)

But if that same person burst through my front door and yelled, "*Hey, Doofus! Run for your life – your ROOF's on FIRE!!*" he'd get a very different reaction from me. I'd probably leave skid marks on the living room carpet.

See the difference? I failed to respond to the first message because the emotion with which it was delivered was *inappropriate* for the situation at hand.

By contrast, the second version of the same basic message was delivered in a tone that was appropriate for the situation. And as a result it did a better job of getting my attention ... strengthened the credibility of the message ... and triggered the desired reaction.

**Third: Dominant emotion techniques should *not* be limited to your sales copy.** They should encompass all aspects of the selling effort. From the creation or selection of new products or services, to the positioning of your company and products. From the development of your sales messaging to establishing your pricing, mode of delivery, guarantee and service after the sale.

Even the selection of the media through which your promotion will be delivered is heavily influenced by your prospects' emotions. Psychographic selection analyzes the fears, desires and buying preferences of your prospects as evidenced by their previous purchases.

## 5 Often Overlooked Kinds of Dominant Emotions That Can Explode Your Response

Usually, when I write about Dominant Emotion marketing, I'm talking about mining the emotions prospects have relative to the benefits your product delivers.

Each one of your benefits will connect neatly with a desire your prospect has and will ALSO address, assuage or offer revenge for a fear or frustration he has.

As you work your way through your copy, ask yourself, "How is my prospect feeling – right now?" Are you talking to them about things that get them excited? Or fearful? Does your USP evoke emotions that are helpful to making the sale?

Are you connecting each benefit your product offers to a resident emotion? Is each point of your "reason-why" copy and your offer connected to an emotion that makes the prospect more willing to buy?

Are you aware of and addressing the negative emotions your customers may have regarding your industry, company or product? Are you using those emotions to facilitate a sale?

And whether you're a business owner, marketer or copywriter, there are five other emotional factors to consider when looking for ways to boost your response:

1. **"How do my prospects feel about my industry?"** Do they assume that you and most of your competitors are honest? Or do they believe that they have to watch you like a hawk? Do they see your industry as glamorous? Or mundane? How do they feel about the treatment they've received from your competitors in the past?
2. **"How do they feel when they realize they need to shop for the products I'm selling?"** Are they intimidated and dreading the process? Or are they excited and looking forward to having a fun shopping experience?



3. **"How do they feel when they're ordering from me?"** Do they feel welcome or do they get the impression that they're intruding on your time? Are they apprehensive about being pressured into buying something they don't want or can't afford, or are they relaxed and confident that you will treat them fairly and give them a good deal on just what they need? Is ordering easy? Do they feel safe giving you their credit card number?
4. **"How do they feel when they make a purchase from me?"** Do they feel like they've been treated with respect, or do they feel insulted and talked down to by your sales people or order takers? Do they feel like they got a great price for a quality product, or do they fear that they paid too much for inferior goods?
5. **"How do they feel after the purchase?"** Do they feel as if they got their money's worth or are they thinking that they got ripped off? Do they feel like they want to tell the world about how great it was to do business with you, or are they raving to all their friends about how awful their experience was? Are they excited about buying from you again, or are they filled with dread at the mere thought of having to do business with you in the future?

Asking these questions often – and especially when planning, writing, editing and reviewing your sales copy – will suggest dozens of ways to overcome prospects' objections and jack up your response.

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## 11 Responses to "Dominant Emotion Copy Wins Every Time"

Thanks Clayton for sharing your insights. This is truly one of the most powerful and comprehensive article on "Writing With Dominant Emotion". I enjoy reading throughout from top to bottom, especially on WHY WORDS are so powerful, with "goose bumps" on my arms... Cheers, Vivian

VL – over a year ago

I feel this article is worth re-print every month or so, just as a reminder as to how we should be copywriting

*Guest (Larry Cole)* – over a year ago

As a new and inexperienced, but desirous, copywriter This article informed a new part of my sleeping conscious and allowed me to see exactly why this man is on top of his field. I extracted and anticipated every aspect of his writing and felt myself actually Looking forward to the next sentence. Although a learning experience and a very informed and exhilarating 10 minutes, I cannot recall enjoying this kind of information in quite awhile. It told me a lot about myself and how others interpret very well written copy.

Thank you so much. I may re-read this many times to get the full impact I may have overlooked.

*Guest (Dominant Emotion Copy Wins every time)* – over a year ago

AWAI member Guillermo Rubio shared this link to an amazing article and I'm so grateful he did. Clayton's explanation of the "Dominant Emotion" is pure copywriting (selling) gold! This begs be printed out and thoroughly studied...word-by-blessed-word.

*Alan Steacy* – over a year ago

This article has really opened my eyes considerably when thinking of adding emotion to copy and this one line that I pulled from it is pure gold.

BOTTOM LINE: When a word triggers a thought ... which triggers an emotion ... which triggers an impulse ... which triggers an action in thousands or millions at the same time, it's called "Great Sales Copy."

That one sentence, once grasped and taken to heart, is clearly going to help transform ordinary copywriters into great ones, I can only hope to be one of them!

*John DeProspero* – over a year ago

There was a song back in the 70's that said, "It's only words, and words are all I have to take your heart away." I liked your examples. I think you covered every angle.

*Guest (Kathy)* – over a year ago

Wowee! I too got the link from "G's" article this week, and it couldn't have come at a better time. I've just finished the Accelerated Program, am putting the final touches on my practice package to submit for my first round of feedback, and I can see far too many opportunities for improvement already. Clayton, as someone new to this business, yet 100% committed to the Writer's Life, your words of wisdom are always spot on and an inspiration. Heartfelt THANK YOU!

*Liz Illgen* – over a year ago

Hello Clayton. It was sheer destiny that called me out and lured me to reading this article, "Dominant Emotion Copy Wins Every Time." The timing could not have been better. Thank you for sharing priceless nuggets so freely, and so passionately. And might I add, positively engaging from beginning to end. You speak my language to a large degree. And as a result, I have gained confidence as a newbie to find my voice and perfect it with passion. Again, thank you!

*Andra* – over a year ago

THE WORD IS THE CREATOR OF EVERYTHING.

Emotion evoking article beyond fathoming unless one understands the WORD. I love this article for what it is and what it's not. What it is is holding me and inspiring me. What it's not is for me alone to ponder. Both ways, Mr. Clayton, have stirred my emotions. Thank you.

*Guest (soarbolde)* – over a year ago

At the time I read this copy, I was writing a salesletter straight through from start to finish. I stopped to take a break. A few sentences in I was hooked all the way to the end. As I read, I thought, this is the kind of copywriting I'd like to aspire to. When I resumed my writing, I kept thinking...dominant emotion copy.

*writeyoureality* – over a year ago

Good food for thought and ideas.

*Wanda F Sewell* – over a year ago

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