

Grab Your Prospect by the Eyeballs!

By Clayton Makepeace

Please excuse the champagne, confetti and funny hats.

We're celebrating here: I just got the news from a client — and my new promotion just kicked the living daylights out of his control!

No, I can't say who the client is, what the product is, or even what industry he's in. But just feast your eyes on these numbers:

- The old control from another writer is pulling in 3.9 new customers per thousand pieces mailed and, after fulfillment, is losing \$260/M — a net return on investment (ROI) of just 52.9%.
- My new package is pulling in 9.8 new customers and \$430 in profits per thousand pieces mailed — a net return on investment of 169%.



In terms of ROI, my package beat the control by more than three to one.

Can you see why we're drinking in the middle of the day ... on a *WORK DAY*?

But wait — it gets better ...

There are *two versions* of my new package — and the only difference between them is the headline:

My second headline is pulling in 13.9 orders and an \$800 net profit per thousand pieces mailed — a net return on investment of 227%!

That's a 58-percentage-point difference: A 34% lift above my original headline.

Yippee — have another glass of champagne!

That lift will make all the difference in the world for my client: If he mailed 12 million copies of this direct mail package in the next year (a conservative estimate) at these response levels, the second headline would put 49,200 more new customers on his file than the first one ...

... And 4.4 MILLION more dollars of clear profit into his pocket!

That's the stuff that industry-leading companies are made of!

The moral of the story ...

Your headline is #1

Don't get me wrong: Every part of your sales message is important. Your opening is crucial. Your presentation of product benefits ... of proof and credibility elements ... of the offer and premiums ... of your guarantee ... and of your closing, "ask-for-the-sale" copy are all critical.

But of all the things you do to produce a sale, nothing equals your headline when it comes to pushing response through the roof.

In my 37 years in this business, I've often seen great new headlines produce 25%, 35%, even 45% lifts in response and ROI. And of course, I've seen them add months – even a year or more – to the lifespan of an aging control.

Why are heads so important? Two reasons:

FIRST, your headline is the demurely raised eyebrow ... the whisper in the ear ... the tap on the shoulder ... or the shrieking air raid horn (remember those?) that at the moment of impact, make it impossible for your prospect to look at anyone but you – or more precisely, anyone's ad but yours.

SECOND, your headline is the gateway to your sales copy. More than that: It's the sales copy that persuades your prospect to read your sales copy.

In short, great headlines have only two functions: 1) To grab your reader's attention, and 2) To convert that attention to readership of your sales message.

When you study the most effective headlines ever written, you can't help but notice that each one accomplishes these twin tasks by offering the reader a BRIBE: A compelling practical and/or emotional benefit in exchange for reading your sales message.

Whether explicit or implicit, shouted or whispered, the best heads you'll ever read – or write – will be a proposed transaction: "Read this," they say, "and this very specific, very wonderful thing will happen for you."

The World's 3 Most Powerful Headline Techniques

There is no "right way" to write a killer head. In fact there are as many headline techniques as there are copywriters, products and services, benefits and consumer emotions to be addressed.

Let's take a look at three of the most powerful headline techniques ever – approaches that have produced huge winners for John Caples, Gary Bencivenga, Jim Rutz, Bob Hutchinson, Arthur Johnson – and yes, for me, too ...

- PURE BENEFIT HEADLINES present only the primary practical benefit offered by the product.

Some examples ...

**"Who else wants a whiter wash
— *with no hard work?*"**

* * * * *

**"Great new discovery kills kitchen odors
quick — makes indoor air "country-fresh."**

* * * * *

**"Super Spy Lets You See Through
Walls, Fences, and Locked Doors."**

* * * * *

**"Who *Else* Wants to Get At Least
TWO TIMES RICHER
In This Bear Market?"**

* * * * *

"What's Wrong With Getting Richer *QUICKER?*"

* * * * *

NOTE: Once upon a time, pure benefit headlines were all the rage. They were a huge leap forward from the days when most ads had no headline, or simply touted a product feature.

But today, in our over-advertised-to society, our prospects are being offered identical benefits by dozens, scores, or hundreds of competing advertisers.

Unless the benefit you're offering is truly unique – or presented in a very unique and intriguing way, you'll probably need to do more than just present or imply a benefit to win.

Here's how John Carlton turned a benefit lead into something absolutely unique and made his ad a must-read:

**"Amazing Secret Discovered
By One-Legged Golfer Adds 50 Yards
to Your Drives, Eliminates Hooks and Slices ... and Can Slash Up to 10 Strokes
From Your Game Almost Overnight."**

* * * * *

- PURE EMOTION HEADS directly address the emotional need, frustration or fear that the product's primary benefit addresses – only hinting at the practical benefit.

Examples ...

"Lies, Lies, Lies
We investors are FED UP
with everyone lying to us
and wasting our money!"

* * * * *

**"Tell The "Health Police" To Take A *Flying Leap* –
And Return To Life's *GUILTIEST PLEASURES!*"**

* * * * *

**"You can laugh at money worries —
if you follow this simple plan"**

* * * * *

NOTE: Pure emotion leads have always worked very well for me. But ONLY when they are followed immediately with a strong presentation of the benefits you're promising the prospect in return for reading your copy and (ultimately) buying your product.

- COMBINED BENEFIT/EMOTION HEADS present the product's chief benefit and either imply or state the emotional pay-

off for the reader.

For example ...

"They laughed when I sat down at the piano, but when I started to play ... "

* * * * *

**"Laugh All The Way To The Gas Pump!
How rising gas prices can make you up to 307% richer in 2005"**

* * * * *

**"To men who want to
Quit Work some day"**

* * * * *

**"FORBIDDEN CURES!"
"Remarkable Cures CENSORED By Knife-Happy Surgeons
and Greedy Drug Companies:**

Medically Proven Remedies That Heal *Without* Drugs or Surgery!"

* * * * *

**"The Amazing Face-Lift-In-a-Jar
Used by Hollywood Stars Who Don't
Want Plastic Surgery"**

* * * * *

**Join millions who are saying ...
"Thanks For NOTHING, Wall Street — I'd Rather Do It MYSELF!"**

"10 Ways To Grow MUCH RICHER Without Touching A SINGLE STOCK"

* * * * *

To me, these kinds of combined benefit/emotion leads are the best of all worlds, and have given me some of the biggest winners of my career.

Four Easy Ways To Supercharge Any Headline

Regardless of whether your headline is pure benefit, pure emotion, or a combination of the two, there are dozens of ways to give it greater selling power.

Here are just four ...

1. Present a proposition: Great propositions make a statement that the reader already believes and tantalize him with the implications of that statement.

For example ...

"For every illness, there is a country
where it simply doesn't exist ... "

* * * * *

"A Healthier *BRAIN* Is the Best Doctor Your *BODY* Will Ever Have!"

"Introducing the single greatest health breakthrough of our generation."

* * * * *

"As soon as you realize that
Wall Street is wrong, wrong, WRONG ...

You'll get rich, rich, RICH!"

* * * * *

2. Propose a transaction: Transaction leads add credibility to your headline benefit by disclosing that you're asking something from the reader in turn for the promised benefit.

For example ...

"Read This Now ...
Or Kiss Your Money GOODBYE!"

* * * * *

"If you've got 20 minutes a month,
I guarantee to work a financial
miracle in your life

!"

* * * * *

**"Give me 90 days and I'll help
you disease-proof your body
and add *many* good years to your life!"**

* * * * *

3. Use specificity to create credibility: Include specific facts that make your headline instantly credible, or connect it to a current news event for credibility.

For example ...

**"1,384 "ENRONS" Are Now
Racing Towards BANKRUPTCY"**

* * * * *

"Shameless Two-Faced S.O.B.s!"

**"While urging YOU to buy their shares,
MICROSOFT executives are quietly dumping BILLIONS of dollars-worth of their companies' stock!"**

* * * * *

"Has Greenspan Lost His *Mind*?"

* * * * *

4. Get the prospect's natural curiosity working for you: Intrigue and curiosity heads tease the benefit or begin the conversation by telling a fascinating story.

For example ...

"How I Made a Fortune With a 'Fool Idea'"

* * * * *

**"How a Bald-Headed Barber Helped
Save My Hair"**

* * * * *

**"How Doctors Stay Well
While Treating Sick People All Day"**

* * * * *

**"Weiss Better Shut the F@!# Up
or Get a *BODYGUARD*."**

* * * * *

"The Great Vitamin Hoax"

* * * * *

**"Are you and your doctor making these
common mistakes with your health?"**

* * * * *

How can these concepts help give YOU bigger winners, more often?

Why not try this: Print this article and sit down with a headline you're working on now. Then, ask yourself these six questions:

1. Does your headline offer the reader a reward for reading your sales copy?
2. What specifics could you add to make your headline more intriguing and believable?
3. Does your headline trigger a strong, actionable emotion the reader already has about the subject at hand?
4. Does your headline present a proposition that will instantly get your prospect nodding his or her head?
5. Could your headline benefit from the inclusion of a proposed transaction?
6. Could you add an element of intrigue to drive the prospect into your opening copy?

Spend 15 minutes on it and I'll bet you'll come up with something great!

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3 Responses to "Grab Your Prospect by the Eyeballs"

You had me wanting to read the articles.

Guest (Kathy) – over a year ago

Love this article. The perfect advice for a piece I'm working on - you're such a good teacher. Thanks so much for sharing your wisdom.

MaryAnna Rose – over a year ago

This is an excellent article with a great six-point list to check against my headlines. I wrote two pages of notes in a spiral notebook so I can quickly and easily refer back to all the invaluable points. Thank you, Clayton Makepeace!

Guest (Diane Young) – over a year ago

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