

HINTS & TIPS...The sales letter

Research shows the letter is usually the 1st thing people read. Here is our checklist to help you write an effective sales letter, covering the writing process, the writing style and the content of the letter.

The writing process

Put as much effort into the letter as you did into the brochure. Research shows the letter is usually the 1st thing people read. Get it right and people will read and keep your information. Get it wrong and they won't.

Know your customers

If you don't know about your market, their needs and anxieties you will not know "which buttons to press" and your response will be minimal.

Reread and re-edit

Never send your 1st draft. Put it to one side, leave it for an hour or even a day, reopen it and reread it. Ask other people to read it. Think of a couple of customers you know well and try to imagine their reaction to your letter. Your 3rd draft will be a great improvement over the 1st.

The writing style

It is no good just providing interesting information about your product or service. To get a response you need to sell, sell, sell -but remember some styles work better than others.

Write as you speak

Use a conversational tone and keep sentences short. Avoid long, uncommon or unnecessary words. Correct spelling is important but colloquial grammar can actually aid readability - you don't get bonus marks for correct use of the subjunctive.

Use the "active" - not the "passive"

People tend to do what they are told but only if it is a clear instruction. So you will get a better response by saying "Call us now on 0845 345 7755" than if you say "We await your call on 0845 345 7755".

Make it easy on the eye

Don't crowd your text onto the paper. Break your letter up by using short paragraphs. Use bulleted or numbered lists to emphasize key points.

Beware of humour

Be very careful of trying to be funny. Something you find killingly funny may at best leave your reader cold, at worst be deemed offensive.

The writing style

The **AIDA** principles have been used successfully for years. First grab your reader's **A**ttention. Then stimulate their **I**nterest in your product. Convert this interest into **D**esire. And finally convince them to take **A**ction. If your sales letter does not have these 4 elements (and in the right order) it will not be as effective as it could be.

Get to the point

Most people will only read the headline and the 1st couple of lines. If you haven't told the reader what you have to offer within 50 words, you never will.

Sell the benefits not the features

You may be proud of the technology, sophistication, flexibility etc. behind your product or service but remember that your reader just wants to know what is in it for him.

Offer something for free

Everyone wants something for free. Offer your reader something for free and with no obligation. Offer free information, a quotation or valuation, a newsletter, a test-drive, a product sample, a seminar. Make it relevant but make it clear it is free, no risk and no obligation.

Include a guarantee

If you can, offer a guarantee with your product. If you can't guarantee the product, offer a guarantee of your service, delivery or price. A guarantee adds credibility to your offer and helps to convince the more skeptical.

Include testimonials

Let other satisfied customers sing your praises. It's far more convincing than if it is coming from you. Quote from letters of satisfaction but remember to get the writer's permission first.

Make them respond

Don't forget to ask for the order. Always finish your letter with a crystal clear call to action.

Set a deadline

People will put things off if there is no urgency to act. Increase the sense of urgency by setting a deadline to receive some further benefit.

Make it easy

Different people may want to respond in different ways so make it as easy as possible for them. Always include all your contact details (telephone, fax, website, email and full address). Consider options to reduce the cost to the customer (Reply-paid envelope, Freepost address, Freephone and Local-Rate numbers etc.).

A letter must be signed

Ideally you should hand sign the letters. Including a high quality scan of your signature is OK, particularly if it is inky-blue. Never have your letters PP'd by someone else.

Always include a PS

Many people will read a PS before they read anything else. Your PS should restate your offer and repeat the call to action.

For other useful marketing information visit the "Free Stuff" section of the MarketingFile.com website.