

Basic Steps to Strong Headlines

Transcript



Transcript

(Watch the video at www.communemedia.com/blog/headline-video/.)

Simon Smith, Strategy Lead, Commune:

Hey, it's Simon.

As you may already know, in our videos you'll learn how to:

- Drive more traffic to your website
- Convert more leads
- Build stronger relationships with those leads
- And leverage those relationships to sell more of your products and services—again and again

The focus of our videos is results-oriented, measurable internet marketing strategy. And effective content that's optimized for search engines, readability and persuasion.

In this video, we're going to look at an important aspect of your content: your headlines.

So important, in fact, that people often don't read any other parts of your pages—and if you get the headline wrong, they definitely won't.

I asked Sara to come and talk to you on camera about this, so that you can **write headlines that drive traffic, make people pay attention and get people to take action.**

At the end of this video, I'll tell you where you can go to get a transcript—so you can have some notes handy when you're writing strong headlines for your business.

Sara Chappel, Content Specialist, Commune:

The first things you need to know about headlines, is that if you ignore your headlines, your prospects will ignore you. And it's easy to tell why.

Studies show that two out of ten people read body copy, eight out of ten read headlines.

That's **80% of your readers read your headlines**, 20% read your body copy.

Also, it's your first chance to kind of establish a relationship with your prospects.

And like the old chestnut says, "you never get a second chance to make a first impression." And that's pretty true of headlines as well.

One thing you'll have to remember about writing headlines, though. Is if your **writing online it's a very different act than if you're writing offline**. Writing headlines online isn't the same as writing them in print.

So in a magazine or newspaper, the headline appears with its content. So even if readers aren't sure what the story is about, they can easily keep reading and figure it out.

In fact, good print headlines are often deliberately quirky, unusual or vague. They use puns, they tweak curiosity so the story gets read.

Simon:

Sometimes you'll see a headline that is maybe just two words, that says something like, "Buy now," complemented by a picture and other content that gives context to the headline. But without that context the headline itself makes no sense.

Sara:

You're absolutely right. And **online, headlines have to stand on their own a lot of the time**.

Think about search engine results, or on social networking sites. Most of those places only have the headlines, **so you don't have the extra content to give you context**.

So your readers don't have time to ferret out the meaning of an unusual headline. If you give it to them straight, they'll reward you with clicks. Otherwise, they'll just click away.

There are **three things that you can do that virtually guarantee magnetic headlines**.

The first thing is to **appeal to people's self interest**.

You'll never go wrong with headlines that tell people they can be sexy, rich, powerful, skinny and, essentially, a much better person than they are now.

As an added bonus, if you tell them they won't have to work hard, and you have a headline guaranteed to draw eyes.

The second thing you can do is to **appeal to people's love of news and novelty**.

Use Words like "Introducing," "Finally," and "New." They're like catnip for prospects.

Third thing you can do is to **engage your prospects' curiosity**.

You know, if you think about somebody sitting and surfing online, they're kinda sleepy, they're sort of in their little online zone. If you can make them sit up and go "huh?" And Surprise them out of their sleepy stupor, you're golden. The chances are that much greater that they are going to click through to your content.

Simon:

I think that all of the things that you just mentioned come back to one of the most important points whenever you're doing marketing, which is to put yourself in the position of your prospect.

And think about what's going on in their mind, and what would appeal to them. So do you think that applies particularly to headlines?

Sara:

Absolutely, **there is no better way to write a headline than to put yourself in somebody else's shoes and figure out what it is they want to read.**

So three things to put in your headlines: self interest, news or curiosity. Or a combination of the three.

But there are other elements that make a good headline as well.

It helps to **include keywords in your headlines** as well.

Now if you know anything about SEO, you know that keywords are really important in you headline, but they're important for another reason too. **They establish a feeling of familiarity for your readers.**

Think about. If your readers type a phrase into Google, and they come on your site, and in their headline is the exact phrase that they just typed in, they automatically know that their in the right place.

You've eased their journey into your copy. So use keywords in your headlines for SEO purposes, but also to make your reader feel comfortable.

So going back to what makes good headlines. **The best headlines appeal to the most elemental of human emotions.**

You know what they are: we don't want to feel shame or humiliation. We want things to be easy and fast. We have a sense of urgency.

We also feel like we want to belong. Right? We want to be part of the in-crowd, we access to exclusive information, that nobody else has.

If you poke at these kinds of emotions, you'll create resonate with your prospects.

Alright, now I have a situation for you, and I know you've been there before. But what do you do when you've got a deadline looming and no ideas?

Simon:

Oh yeah, a particular deadline is within 12 hours maybe the next morning and you're up and night and you're trying to rack your brain and nothing is coming. And you just know you have to write a headline for a landing page, and you're just struggling, because it's just not coming out. So what do you do?

Sara:

Absolutely, there is nothing in your head but the sound of crickets?

You turn to the **two types of headlines, and by extension, the two types of articles that readers love: lists and how-to's.**

Lists, first of all, are irresistible because they **make an explicit promise about what the reader's going to learn.**

Five Secrets to Flat Abs Forever. They're going to learn The Best 30 Songs No-one's Ever Heard Of. They're going learn the top 100 restaurants where you're going to spend under 10 bucks.

It's a promise to your reader, and they know exactly what they're going to get right away.

The other benefit of list posts, is that we're constantly bombarded with information. A list post filters out the information and feeds your prospect info in easily digestible bits.

And that's really important when we have random facts coming at us all the time.

So, they filter and they make that explicit promise.

How-tos are kind of the same thing. They **make an explicit promise to the reader and they have the added benefit of helping your prospect solve a problem.**

Pain's a powerful motivator and how-tos promise to ease some of that pain.

So if you look on the cover of any consumer magazine, chances are you're going to see a number, which indicates a list post, and you're probably going to see you'll see at least one "how-to" article.

So, I have one more technique, especially if for people staring down a deadline and starting to panic.

Let someone else write them for you.

Other **writers through the years have already figured out a bunch of headline formats that work**—so capitalize on their efforts.

All you have to do is Google "headline templates"—and you'll get a series of... headline templates. All you have to do then, is fill in your particular details and you're good to go.

This is based on 80 years worth of people writing advertising copy and marketing copy. We've figured out what pushes people's button, so why reinvent the wheel?

Simon:

What's the best headline you've ever seen? Can you think of one?

Sara:

Oh boy, probably, it's from *Tested Advertising Methods*, and it's been used in piles of places. But it's "How a Fool Stunt Made Me into a Star Salesman."

And I think when I was writing articles about headlines, I wrote something like, "How a 74 Year Old Book That Doesn't Mention the internet can Teach You How to Write Great Online Headlines."

So that was me taking an 80 year-old headline and repurposing it. So I think that's the one that really sticks in my mind.

Simon:

And in that headline, it has the curiosity factor. Because you're thinking: how can something so old, still be relevant? And it also has the self-interest, teach you how to write great headlines.

Sara:

Absolutely. And actually, the added bonus of that one, is that it has the possibility of being an interesting story. And people can't resist stories. So it's a killer headline.

Simon:

Thank you very much, Sara.

We use this advice in our own business, to write and test headlines on a daily basis. And I can tell you that it works.

So if you want to get started, get the transcript for this video on our website. Just go to www.communedia.com/blog/headline-video/.

When you're on our site, you can also find a bunch of other resources on internet marketing and content optimization. Like our *writing guide*. And you can also download our *Instant Content Optimization* e-book.

If you have a large website and you want help finding out where your business might be leaking traffic, leads and sales, you can request an optimization analysis, absolutely *free* and with no obligation, directly on the site. Just click when you're there, you can't miss it.

Also, please leave a comment on this video. Let us know what you liked, what you didn't like, and what you might like to see in future, so we can create videos that address your internet marketing and content challenges.

Thanks for watching, and I'll speak to you again soon.