

# MERCHANDISING

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## The Power of a Headline

Picture two well dressed college students hitchhiking home for Christmas vacation. Each holds up a sign to help attract a ride.

The first student's sign reads "To Jacksonville." The second student's sign reads "To Mom's for Christmas." The first is factual and to the point. The second creates a positive image in the mind of drivers who pass. It also plays upon the emotions of the people who are prospects for giving the student a ride. There is little question as to which student will get home first. It's a matter of salesmanship.



Advertising headlines have the same job as the hitchhikers' signs. Headlines must attract attention, involve the reader and create interest at a glance. And they must create a positive image in the minds of prospective buyers.

In most print advertisements the headline is the entrance, the front door. Unless the advertiser entices the reader to walk through that door then little else in the ad matters. True, this job is shared by the illustration. And the illustration can be so appealing, so provocative that it stops and interests readers all by itself. But the effectiveness of even this kind of illustration is enhanced by the right headline.

David Ogilvy, the legendary ad writer, claims that five times as many people read the headline as the body copy. The effectiveness of the headline accounts for 80 percent of the value of the ad, he says.

"The wickedest of all sins (in advertising) is to run an advertisement without a headline," according to Ogilvy. He also calls it a sin to write tricky headlines that play on puns, slogans and other "obscurities." These don't create interest, promise a benefit, or make the reader want to continue reading.

Since the headline is the heart of an advertisement, write it first. Pretend that it will be all the reader will learn about what you are selling. Once you have written a headline like this, writing the rest of the ad will be much easier.

One of my old college advertising texts listed selling "stratagems" for advertisers to use when writing a headline. It urged headline writers to include as many as possible of the following in their headlines: Mention the prospect and his or her interests, offer benefits, report news, make the reader curious and mention the product favorably.

Let's say you have for sale a group of sons of Chesterfield, a structurally correct Angus bull with a balanced set of EPDs, except that he is exceptional in marbling. How would you write a headline to promote the sale of these bulls to commercial producers? We will assume that you have a good photograph of Chesterfield which shows that he is well muscled and structurally correct.

First decide what you want readers to know. 1- Chesterfield sons can improve the carcass quality of the cattle they sire. 2- This can be worth more money to buyers. 3-

Buyers can achieve improved carcass quality without sacrificing other traits such as calving ease, weaning weight or yearling weight.

You might write: "Chesterfield Sons, Strong on Marbling with Above Average Growth and Milk EPDs."

Or: "Only an Angus Bull Like Chesterfield, Can Provide You with More Choice Cattle, Plus Good Growth and Milk."

Headlines like these use at least three of the five selling stratagems. They cover the prospective buyer's interests— the ability to sell more Choice cattle. The benefit offered is increased income from higher quality cattle with no need to sacrifice other traits for marbling. And, the Angus bull Chesterfield is mentioned favorably.

You might add news by including the fact that "Chesterfield's New Calf Crop" is for sale or something of that order.

You might stimulate curiosity by asking in the headline, "How Can You Boost Marbling in Your Calves and Keep Weaning and Yearling Weights High? With Sons of Chesterfield."

Advertisers in every issue of this magazine are in competition for the reader's time and interest with about 100 other advertisers. In some publications it is more and in some less. But in any given issue the best ads are read by only 30 percent of the readers. Some ads attract far less than 10 percent of the readers. The cost per page for an ad that gets 7 percent readership is the same as one that attracts 30 percent readership. From this perspective, effective headlines are worth working for.