

## Phase I

### Keys To Successful Online Sales Letters

*“Primarily writing good copy is essentially the same no matter where it’s presented but writing for the Internet requires one important distinction. That distinction is less verbiage with more impact.”*

Charlene Rashkow

#### **Understanding The Culture Of The Internet**

To make the most of your website sales letter you need to understand the Internet, its culture, and the people who use it on a regular basis. It’s one huge smorgasbord of information and opportunity -- one that grows larger every single day.

New websites are being launched at an enormous rate. You can find just about anything online including the good, the bad, and the utterly tasteless. The choices truly are mind-boggling.

For the consumer, it’s a rich resource of information and a way of bringing the world home, via their computer screens. For businesses, it’s a dirt-cheap tool for reaching previously inaccessible customers and markets.

Many offline businesses have an online presence as well. It’s just another tool in their respective arsenals. Still, other businesses are being created exclusively for the web. It’s also a chance to add convenient at-home shopping to virtually any product or service.

With millions of people already online and more added daily, it’s not surprising that new sales-oriented websites are popping up at an alarming rate. For the consumer, this means even more choices, making it more challenging to spend a limited amount of cash. For businesses, it means increased competition.

Despite the growing competition, setting up a sales-generating site has massive appeal worldwide. It seems that everyone and their cousin already has at least one website. Yet, some of the simplest sites are among the most successful. Yes, it is possible to succeed with a ‘mini-site’ -- if you do it the right way.

Marketing online is about gently wooing prospects – ‘pulling’ them inside your site, as opposed to ‘pushing’ a product upon them.

Doing business online means selling in a ‘virtual’ environment. Buying and selling online is a totally new concept -- a major shift from traditional shopping. Since most people naturally resist change, you face an added challenge when marketing to the unseasoned online prospect.

The most effective way to win over new online prospects is to make your offer more tangible, real, and credible. Make it easy for buyers to envision exactly what they’re getting and let them know when they’ll get it. Create an ordering process that’s fun, easy and natural – one that simulates buying from a catalogue, direct mail piece, infomercial, or the shopping channel. Give your audience something they can touch – something that makes the whole process of buying online more like the real world they’re used to.

Traditionally, the lure of the Internet has been due to the vast resources freely available to anyone with a telephone line and computer. Surfers quickly get used to this unlimited accessibility to massive amounts of information, free of charge. A fair amount of it is useless junk, but for many, the lure of anything ‘free’ is too tempting to resist.

One approach is to tap into this tradition and provide helpful information on your site in addition to your sales copy. You don’t have to give away the store by any means... but by feeding the frenzy, you’re apt to be more accepted in the online marketing world.

## **Building An Online Business Is About Building Relationships**

Marketing is largely a process of building relationships – regardless of the media or method. But the online population seems particularly sensitive to ‘in your face’ marketing. Respect this reality, or you’ll pay a hefty price.

Think of your business as an on-going enterprise. Yes, you want to generate sales immediately... but more importantly, you want to build a successful business. Real riches come not from first-timers, but from your repeat customers and the referrals those customers send your way. This can only happen when you’ve truly satisfied the customer initially – where he willingly becomes an advocate of your business.

Selling online is about doing everything in your power to persuade targeted prospects to make a purchase. But this can never be done at the expense of a relationship. So if you use deception, trickery or shady practices to get the sale, you cannot create long-term customer success and without this, you will imminently fail.

## Understanding The Online Audience

Why are people online? What is it they want to get out of their online experience?

According to a recent survey conducted by the *Pew Research Center*, nearly 75% of users went online to seek out information. The type of information most sought had to do with their hobbies, special interests, and purchases they were planning for the near future. 64% visited travel related websites... while 62% went to weather sites. 54% sought data and information about health and medicine... while just over 50% conducted educational research.

What does this tell you as a marketer? It says that once online, people are goal directed. They seek out certain things of interest to them personally. If you want to succeed, you better cater to the wishes of the marketplace. This means giving them what they want, when they want it. It's all about facilitating the search by getting straight to the heart of the matter.

People don't want to be entertained... anyone can get their fill of entertainment from television. Forget flash introductions and splash pages – that only eats up precious time. Instead, help people get the information they seek immediately. Give them clear, attractive benefits, backed up by real data. Make it easy for prospects to comparative shop. Give them the solutions they want, backed by logical straight talk. Make it easy for visitors to convince themselves. Quick, easy information of relevance – with no fluff and no filler -- that's the way to serve the online user.

People today are time-poor. Evolutionary changes in the workplace have resulted in heavier workloads and higher stress levels. There just isn't enough time between work, family obligations, and chores to do all the things they'd really like to do in their busy lives.

Yet the available choices of new products and services keep multiplying at a rapid pace. Everyday exciting new products are unveiled -- right before your eyes -- fueling temptations and unleashing desires.

When consumers do get online, they want to make the most of their experience. They're in complete control of the surfing experience. They know what they want and are acutely aware when it's not delivered quickly. Online consumers make fast decisions about how and where they'll spend their time. Just because a visitor shows up at your site, doesn't mean he'll still be there 10 seconds later.

Cater to their 'wants' and you have a fighting chance of sustaining attention and interest. Eliminate any possible obstruction or time-waster. Make it fun, fast and easy to explore your website. Respect the time and intelligence of your visitors. They're in control and they know it. With unlimited choices just a click away, if you don't feed those 'wants' immediately, they'll quickly go elsewhere.

## **Target Your Approach**

Though there are hundreds of millions of people connected to the Internet, only a fraction of these people are prime targets for your offer. It's self-defeating to think otherwise. If you're one of those people who figure you've got something that nearly everyone would love to own – think again. If your product is directed at the general marketplace, you need to re-frame your proposition.

What works best online is a targeted approach to marketing. Narrow your niche. Find those who are best suited to your solution. You want capable, eager and qualified prospects only.

Target marketing is precision marketing. You simply find an untapped, under-filled or poorly served market that already exists and shape your offer to fit like a glove to those already established desires. It's simply a matter of identifying those people whose hunger hasn't been adequately satisfied – people who are likely interested in your unique solution and have the means to acquire it.

Online users seek information related to their interests. Do-it-yourself home renovators visit sites that help with their kitchen, bath, basement, and deck building projects. They're most interested in new products and helpful information to make these repairs and upgrades to their homes. Camping enthusiasts plan and book trips online. Home gardeners look for tips on growing bigger, juicier tomatoes than the neighbor next door.

What market do you serve? Identify your niche and then make a commitment to dominate it. Make your unique product the ultimate solution for that specific market and ignore the others. By doing so, you'll make an impact on those who can benefit the most from whatever it is you offer. You can still target separate markets, but do so with separate websites that cater exclusively to each.

## **Direct Marketing With A Twist**

The best model for website sales letters is direct mail. Why? Direct response marketing is all about getting an immediate response, not building an image. Direct marketing strives for maximum measurable returns on a minimum investment – every time out. With your online sales letters, you should also strive for a sale (or response) right away.

If you fail to win an immediate reply, chances are the prospect will forget about your offer and never order at all. In direct mail, however, the prospect has your letter, order form, envelope, brochure and lift letter in hand. It's something he can easily place on the coffee table and pick up again later, when he's ready to

seriously consider ordering. Each piece in the package has the capability to grab interest, increase desire and convince the prospect to buy.

But online, you don't have that luxury. For the prospect to go back and read your letter, he must either print it out on his own paper and using his own ink and burning his own money... or he needs to make a conscious decision to return to your site later. Sure, 'book-marking' might make it somewhat easier to return, but if the page is merely placed among hundreds of other favorites, there's a good chance your page will be overlooked altogether.

So the main disadvantage of online sales letters vs. off-line, is that they only exist as pixels on the user's screen – unless or until the prospect decides to print it. Even then, your sales letter gets printed on familiar paper -- usually of the plain white variety – so there's no chance of creating the same 'feel' or special effect that a multiple-piece direct mail package can.

But the obvious advantage is the cost savings. Online there's no postage, traditionally the single most expensive element of any direct marketing campaign. Since your sales letter exists only in cyberspace, there's no printing cost whatsoever. Additionally, you never have to worry about how much material you can stuff into an envelope without exceeding standard postage costs. In direct marketing, exceeding the limit by even a slight margin can be devastating to your entire campaign by multiplying actual costs.

Online, the amount of space available is virtually unlimited. You can include as many pages and go into as much detail as you want. Additional space can always be acquired at a very reasonable cost. The challenge is that the online prospect has a limited attention span... so your letter needs to keep him on the edge of his seat or he's gone elsewhere.

It's no surprise that so many have been attracted to the Internet as a means of marketing products and services. It has a worldwide reach and the cost of setting up business is a tiny percentage of what it would take to set up in the real world. It's an open invitation to every breed of marketer to jump in and take advantage of this huge opportunity. The result is that for some, the web has become a massive new avenue for advertising. They attempt to entice people by delivering a barrage of messages in the hope that one 'sticks'. Or they employ glitz and flash with the mistaken belief that they can somehow 'trick' people into paying attention to their message and buying their product.

Truth is... this approach would never fly offline. It would be a complete waste of money to even try. But because it's so cheap to set up shop on the web, some take a 'let's try it' approach. They simply don't understand the online environment and the low tolerance of users for such an approach.

## **Credibility Is Everything**

People buy from those they know, like, and trust. To succeed online, you need to create a comfortable environment where prospects can get a feel for who you are and what you're all about. It's important that you establish credibility at every opportunity and help foster good feelings about doing business with you.

The proliferation of products and services online has inevitably led to an increase in frauds and cheats. Media stories bring some of the larger scams to light... but only after hundreds or thousands of people have been victimized. Buyers have their guard up as a matter of self-protection. It's not a case of being innocent until proven guilty. Online, you're suspect from the beginning and need to earn the trust of consumers before they'll ever buy from you.

Visitors arrive at your site presumably due to your lead generation efforts. They're interested, but unsure. Perhaps they've never heard of you. The fact that you live half way around the world is another cause for concern. Your job is to alleviate any uncertainty and make visitors feel comfortable about you, your product and business.

When you know your market and you communicate such an understanding, your prospects soon develop an affinity towards you.

Talk to your prospect as a friend. Be warm and personal. Tell them the way it is in a straightforward and truthful manner. Don't beat around the bush. Be direct and forthright – the same way you'd communicate with a friend. Show you care. Demonstrate a knowledge and respect for your audience and they'll be inclined to like you too.

Trust begins with a professional presence -- and that begins with your own domain name. It's shocking to me how many marketers attempt to sell products from a site that clearly exposes their amateur status. Domain names cost only a few dollars for a full year's use. And professional web hosting can be had for just \$5 a month – even free in some cases. So there's absolutely no need for anyone to be marketing products from a *Geocities* or *Angelfire* site. Get your own domain and find an affordable host that doesn't demand an advertising banner or pop-up window promoting their services on your site. That's all it takes to get started on the right foot.

Make full use of endorsements, testimonials, and associations. Give people something that's a little easier for them to accept and believe – like the comments of a recognized authority who has used your product.

Project an image of stability. Let people know you've been in business for x-number of years and show them your real world business address and facilities.

Give them something they can relate to -- something that makes you seem like a real, legitimate business with a physical location somewhere on planet earth. It's comforting and reassuring for prospects to know that yours is a real legitimate business.

## **Strategy Is More Important Than Creativity**

Creativity doesn't sell. It's not the creativity and design skill that go into your web site that makes a difference – it's the appeal of your message. Sure, you may get a lot of people commenting on your beautiful layout, choice of colors, fancy enhancements, and so on. But 'fancy' and 'beautiful' don't sell. Whatever doesn't contribute directly to sales is a waste of time, money, effort, and megabytes.

A proven online strategy is to target a specific market, deliver powerful and unique benefits -- and then introduce a truly irresistible offer. Those three elements alone account for 90% of the effectiveness of any website sales letter. That means 90% of your effort and time should focus on these key elements and only 10% of your time should be allotted to layout and design.

Visitors show up at your site with certain expectations. You've already piqued their interest, whet their appetite, or aroused their sense of curiosity to get them there in the first place. They anxiously anticipate a payoff. It's like walking into a restaurant -- you go there with the expectation of receiving a meal. Everybody does. Now, your visitors are looking for that special something to quench their thirst and satisfy their hunger. So now's the time to feed those freshly activated emotional drivers.

True prospects arrive in search of something – they don't just land on your site by accident. You triggered a spark... now it's a matter of turning that spark of interest or curiosity into a burning desire to buy now. The best way to accomplish this goal is to use proven techniques of targeting a hungry market, unveiling your most appealing benefits and introducing an offer that's too good to resist.

## **Think The Way Your Market Thinks**

Give your prospects exactly what they want. Help them solve a particular problem. Provide an edge that will bring them closer to the magical result they dream of. Pile on benefit after benefit, so they clearly understand the tremendous value they get when they purchase from you.

Make your presentation exclusively for that particular group. If you're marketing to dog owners, resist the temptation to include the owners of different kinds of pets. Shape your offer to fit the market. Dog owners generally wouldn't be interested in knowing your product was also perfect for cats too. In fact, making

such a revelation could actually harm sales. Your product might then be perceived as a ‘generic’ item, rather than a specific solution for a specific category of prospect.

Present your strongest benefits... then, mention the features that make key benefits possible. Provide credible proof that your product delivers what you say it does. Introduce an enticing offer and tell your prospect the exact steps he needs to take next to be able to enjoy all those promised benefits for himself.

Give your prospect all the information he could possibly need to make an intelligent decision. Leave no question unanswered... no stone unturned.

But how you go about it is equally important. Make your key components the most visually dominating parts of your copy. Use headlines, sub-headings, bullet points and frames to suggest important points – points that shouldn’t be missed.

## **Provide Value For Your Prospect’s Time**

Marketing online means catering to an audience. With time at a premium, anything that wastes the precious resource of time is quickly shunned. It’s crucial that you stay on target with your message. Look out for any area where you might have drifted off course. If you go off on a tangent, you’re inviting the prospect to click away -- and that’s exactly what he’ll do.

Maintain a benefit-laden focus. When you’re revealing benefits, you’re discussing what the reader gets. In essence, you’re talking about the reader, so you have his undivided attention. But shift gears for a moment and you may never recover. Launch into a spiel about how wonderful your company is and suddenly you’ve turned off your previously riveted reader.

Make it easy for readers to get your essential message by starting with the benefits of greatest importance to prospects. Highlight key points and sections of your sales letter. Make it fast, easy, convenient, and pleasurable to order from you. Maintain a prospect-centered approach and you’re much more likely to retain readership and interest – essential prerequisites to getting the order.

## **Make An Instant Connection With Your Target Audience**

Since people ultimately buy from those they know, like and trust, make an effort to establish rapport early on. Strive to make a connection with your prospect from the start. Your lead-generation ads and marketing pieces should be in alignment with the first screen of your sales letter. This tells the prospect he’s arrived at the correct location, thus justifying his presence there.

First impressions are critical. If you fail to make a quick connection, your prospect will venture off to another site. Perception is everything. Exist for your prospect. Be agreeable and open – like a friend. Maintain a commitment to helping solve your prospect’s problem and getting him closer to wherever he wants to go.

Perception begins as the first screen of your sales letter loads on the user’s screen. You need to reach out to prospects right away – beginning with the headline.

Not only must your words be relevant and of crucial importance to your target market, your message must also appear easy to read. This means organizing the information and providing adequate spacing. It also means highlighting key areas -- without overdoing it. Online, you can use plenty of white space to make your message appear easy, understandable, and not intimidating in the least. This usually isn’t an option in traditional direct mail as there’s only so much space you can utilize without exceeding standard postage costs.

Short paragraphs with adequate spacing in between is quite appealing to the eye. It tells readers ‘this is quick and easy – keep reading’. It’s also a good idea to avoid really long sentences. Short paragraphs, short (though somewhat varied) sentences, and short words make for easy, effortless reading.

## **Consistently Deliver The Information Your Audience Wants**

In the online world, people travel with one hand on the trigger. The ‘trigger’ in this case is their mouse – the one tool that puts the surfer in total control of their online experience. It’s a good idea to construct your online sales letter with this in mind. Bore your reader for just a second and chances are, he’ll be gone forever.

Capture and sustain reader interest from the headline through to the postscript. Make your message compelling, intriguing, and interesting. Get right to the point without delay. Write each line and paragraph as though its purpose was to lead the reader to the next. Let one compelling thought flow smoothly into the next. Continuously deliver the payoff in the form of benefits and helpful information. Instant and consistent delivery of what the prospect wants to hear is the only way to ensure that he reads on.

Provide as much information as needed to get the sale. Keep it energizing, upbeat and always about the prospect and what your product does for him.

Demonstrate your key points in interesting ways. Use metaphors the reader can relate to. Tell a compelling story to dramatize your ultimate benefit.

## **Keep Your Purpose In Mind As You Write**

You're there to # 1 – make a sale and... #2 – forge a relationship.

The primary purpose of your sales letter is to get the sale. You want to secure a commitment from your prospect to buy. To this end, you need to understand the prospect's problems and aspirations and determine how your product delivers the ultimate solution. Presenting your unique benefits, prove them, and follow up with a strong offer -- loaded with enticement. Make the value of your offer worth many times the asking price.

Gain the attention of your target group of prospects and fuel their interest with your new discovery that will make their lives better in some way. Give them plenty of reasons for taking action now and make it exceptionally easy to order.

It's also important to remind prospects about the cost of inaction. If they fail to decide in favor of action, they're voting in favor of the status quo. Nothing will change in their lives until they change by taking action. That's the message you need to drive home in your letter.

Conduct your business with an eye to the future. Avoid any temptation to grab a quick buck and move on. Establish a sense of stability and a sterling reputation... and your business will grow on its own.

As new prospects continue to arrive at your website, they'll do so with a pre-conceived opinion of you. Continually delight customers and word quickly spreads. But fail to deliver what you promise or make yourself unavailable to customers and you'll soon feel the effects of a major backlash. Exceed your customer's expectations and they might pass the word on to a few close friends. But anger them and you can bet they'll tell anyone who will listen. And in the online world, this happens in record speed as word spreads like wildfire.

Nurture customers. Serve them well. Be there when they need you. Show them respect and appreciation and you'll be well on your way to success. Simply treat people as you'd like to be treated. The golden rule still reigns supreme.

## **Always Stay One Step Ahead**

One thing's for sure, the more successful you become online... the more competitors will try to take advantage of your success for their own gain. In the online world, competitors can literally spring up overnight and start taking customers away from you instantly. The more successful you are, the bigger the target you become.

If you want to maximize your returns and protect your business, you need to be aware of who your competitors are and what they're doing.

Your best bet is to create and sustain an element of exclusivity. Add a special feature, unique benefit, or an additional product or service -- one that would be difficult for others to duplicate.

Know what unique advantages are most appealing to prospects and stay informed about your competitors as best you can. Constantly think of new ways to add even more value, benefit, and exclusivity to your package. That way, when you need to bump up your offer even more, you'll have several ways to do it.